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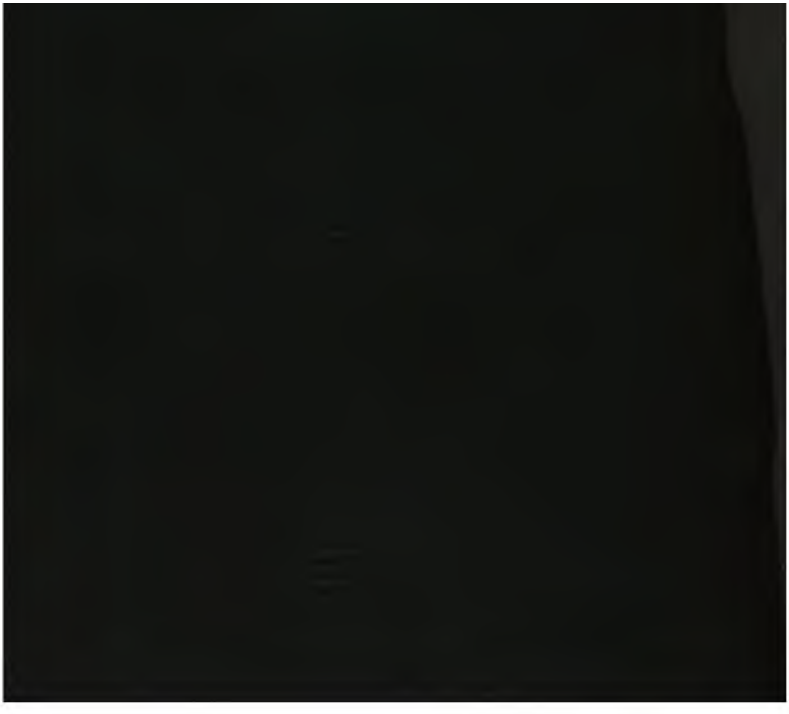

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LITERARY ESSAYS

AMONG MY BOOKS, MY STUDY WINDOWS, FIRESIDE TRAVELS .

BY

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

IN FOUR VOLUMES

VOLUME IV.

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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LITERARY ESSAYS

POPE

1871

In 1675 Edward Phillips, the elder of Milton's nephews, published his *Theatrum Poetarum*. In his Preface and elsewhere there can be little doubt that he reflected the æsthetic principles and literary judgments of his now illustrious uncle, who had died in obscurity the year before.[1] The great poet who gave to English blank verse the grandeur and compass of organ-music, and who in his minor poems kept alive the traditions of Fletcher and Shakespeare, died with no foretaste, and yet we may believe as confident as ever, of that "immortality of fame" which he tells his friend Diodati he was "meditating with the help of Heaven" in his youth. He who may have seen Shakespeare, who doubtless had seen Fletcher, and who perhaps personally knew Jonson,[2] lived to see that false school of writers whom he qualified as "good rhymists, but no poets," at once the idols and the victims of the taste they had corrupted. As he saw, not with-

[1] This was Thomas Warton's opinion.

[2] Milton, a London boy, was in his eighth, seventeenth, and twenty-ninth years, respectively, when Shakespeare (1616), Fletcher (1625), and B. Jonson (1637) died.

out scorn, how they found universal hearing, while he slowly won his audience fit though few, did he ever think of the hero of his own epic at the ear of Eve? It is not impossible; but however that may be, he sowed in his nephew's book the dragon's teeth of that long war which, after the lapse of a century and a half, was to end in the expulsion of the usurping dynasty and the restoration of the ancient and legitimate race whose claim rested on the grace of God. In the following passage surely the voice is Milton's, though the hand be that of Phillips: "Wit, ingenuity, and learning in verse, even elegancy itself, though that comes nearest, are one thing; true native poetry is another, in which there is a certain air and spirit, which, perhaps, the most learned and judicious in other arts do not perfectly apprehend; much less is it attainable by any art or study." The man who speaks of elegancy as coming nearest, certainly shared, if he was not repeating, the opinions of him who thirty years before had said that "decorum" (meaning a higher or organic unity) was "the grand masterpiece to observe" in poetry.[1]

It is upon this text of Phillips (as Chalmers has remarked) that Joseph Warton bases his classification of poets in the dedication to Young of the first volume of his essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope, published in 1756. That was the earliest public and official declaration of war against the reigning mode, though private hostilities and reprisals had been going on for some time. Addison's panegyric

[1] In his Tractate on *Education*.

of Milton in the Spectator was a criticism, not the less damaging because indirect, of the superficial poetry then in vogue. His praise of the old ballads condemned by innuendo the artificial elaboration of the drawing-room pastoral by contrasting it with the simple sincerity of nature. Himself incapable of being natural except in prose, he had an instinct for the genuine virtues of poetry as sure as that of Gray. Thomson's "Winter" (1726) was a direct protest against the literature of Good Society, going as it did to prove that the noblest society was that of one's own mind heightened by the contemplation of outward nature. What Thomson's poetical creed was may be surely inferred from his having modelled his two principal poems on Milton and Spenser, ignoring rhyme altogether in the "Seasons," and in the "Castle of Indolence" rejecting the stiff mould of the couplet. In 1744 came Akenside's "Pleasures of Imagination," whose very title, like a guide-post, points away from the level highway of commonplace to mountain-paths and less domestic prospects. The poem was stiff and unwilling, but in its loins lay the seed of nobler births, and without it the "Lines written at Tintern Abbey" might never have been. Three years later Collins printed his little volume of Odes, advocating in theory and exemplifying in practice the natural supremacy of the imagination (though he called it by its older name of fancy) as a test to distinguish poetry from verse-making. The whole Romantic School, in its germ, no doubt, but yet unmistakably foreshadowed, lies already in the "Ode on the

Superstitions of the Highlands." He was the first to bring back into poetry something of the antique fervor, and found again the long-lost secret of being classically elegant without being pedantically cold. A skilled lover of music,[1] he rose from the general sing-song of his generation to a harmony that had been silent since Milton, and in him, to use his own words,

> "The force of energy is found,
> And the sense rises on the wings of sound."

But beside his own direct services in the reformation of our poetry, we owe him a still greater debt as the inspirer of Gray, whose "Progress of Poesy," in reach, variety, and loftiness of poise, overflies all other English lyrics like an eagle. In spite of the dulness of contemporary ears, preoccupied with the continuous hum of the popular hurdy-gurdy, it was the prevailing blast of Gray's trumpet that more than anything else called men back to the legitimate standard.[2] Another poet, Dyer, whose

[1] Milton, Collins, and Gray, our three great masters of harmony, were all musicians.

[2] Wordsworth, who recognized forerunners in Thomson, Collins, Dyer, and Burns, and who chimes in with the popular superstition about Chatterton, is always somewhat niggardly in his appreciation of Gray. Yet he owed him not a little. Without Gray's tune in his ears, his own noblest Ode would have missed the varied modulation which is one of its main charms. Where he forgets Gray, his verse sinks to something like the measure of a jig. Perhaps the suggestion of one of his own finest lines,

("The light that never was on land or sea,")

was due to Gray's

"Orient hues unborrowed of the sun."

I believe it has not been noticed that among the verses in Gray's

"Fleece" was published in 1753, both in the choice of his subject and his treatment of it gives further proof of the tendency among the younger generation to revert to simpler and purer models. Plainly enough, Thomson had been his chief model, though there are also traces of a careful study of Milton.

Pope had died in 1744, at the height of his renown, the acknowledged monarch of letters, as supreme as Voltaire when the excitement and exposure of his coronation-ceremonies at Paris hastened his end a generation later. His fame, like Voltaire's, was European, and the style which he had carried to perfection was paramount throughout the cultivated world. The new edition of the

Sonnet on the Death of West, which Wordsworth condemns as of no value, the second —

"And reddening Phœbus lifts his golden fires" —

is one of Gray's happy reminiscences from a poet in some respects greater than either of them: —

"Jamque *rubrum* tremulis jubar *ignibus erigere alte*
Cum cœptat natura."

Lucret., iv. 404, 405.

Gray's taste was a sensitive divining-rod of the sources whether of pleasing or profound emotion in poetry. Though he prized pomp, he did not undervalue simplicity of subject or treatment, if only the witch Imagination had cast her spell there. Wordsworth loved solitude in his appreciations as well as in his daily life, and was the readier to find merit in obscurity, because it gave him the pleasure of being a first discoverer all by himself. Thus he addresses a sonnet to John Dyer. But Gray was one of "the pure and powerful minds" who had discovered Dyer during his lifetime, when the discovery of poets is more difficult. In 1753 he writes to Walpole: "Mr. Dyer has more poetry in his imagination than almost any of our number, but rough and injudicious." Dyer has one fine verse, —

"On the dark level of adversity."

"Dunciad," with the Fourth Book added, published the year before his death, though the substitution of Cibber for Theobald made the poem incoherent, had yet increased his reputation and confirmed the sway of the school whose recognized head he was, by the poignancy of its satire, the lucidity of its wit, and the resounding, if somewhat uniform, march of its numbers. He had been translated into other languages living and dead. Voltaire had long before pronounced him "the best poet of England, and at present of all the world."[1] It was the apotheosis of clearness, point, and technical skill, of the ease that comes of practice, not of the fulness of original power. And yet, as we have seen, while he was in the very plenitude of his power, there was already a widespread discontent, a feeling that what "comes nearest," as Phillips calls it, may yet be infinitely far from giving those profounder and incalculable satisfactions of which the soul is capable in poetry. A movement was gathering strength which prompted

> "The age to quit their clogs
> By the known rules of ancient liberty."

Nor was it wholly confined to England. Symptoms of a similar reaction began to show themselves on the Continent, notably in the translation of Milton (1732) and the publication of the *Nibelungen Lied* (1757) by Bodmer, and the imitations of Thomson in France. Was it possible, then, that there was

[1] MS. letter of Voltaire, cited by Warburton in his edition of Pope, vol. iv. p. 38, note. The date is 15th October, 1726. I do not find it in Voltaire's Correspondence.

anything better than good sense, elegant diction, and the highest polish of style? Could there be an intellectual appetite which antithesis failed to satisfy? If the horse would only have faith enough in his green spectacles, surely the straw would acquire, not only the flavor, but the nutritious properties of fresh grass. The horse was foolish enough to starve, but the public is wiser. It is surprising how patiently it will go on, for generation after generation, transmuting dry stubble into verdure in this fashion.

The school which Boileau founded was critical and not creative. It was limited, not only in its essence, but by the capabilities of the French language and by the natural bent of the French mind, which finds a predominant satisfaction in phrases if elegantly turned, and can make a despotism, political or æsthetic, palatable with the pepper of epigram. The style of Louis XIV. did what his armies failed to do. It overran and subjugated Europe. It struck the literature of imagination with palsy, and it is droll enough to see Voltaire, after he had got some knowledge of Shakespeare, continually endeavoring to reassure himself about the poetry of the *grand siècle*, and all the time asking himself, "Why, in the name of all the gods at once, is this *not* the real thing?" He seems to have felt that there was a dreadful mistake somewhere, when poetry must be called upon to prove itself inspired, above all when it must demonstrate that it is interesting, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. Difficulty, according to

Voltaire, is the tenth Muse; but how if there were difficulty in reading as well as writing? It was something, at any rate, which an increasing number of persons were perverse enough to feel in attempting the productions of a pseudo-classicism, the classicism of red heels and periwigs. Even poor old Dennis himself had arrived at a kind of muddled notion that artifice was not precisely art, that there were depths in human nature which the most perfectly manufactured line of five feet could not sound, and passionate elations that could not be tuned to the lullaby seesaw of the couplet. The satisfactions of a conventional taste were very well in their own way, but were they, after all, the highest of which men were capable who had obscurely divined the Greeks, and who had seen Hamlet, Lear, and Othello upon the stage? Was not poetry, then, something which delivered us from the dungeon of actual life, instead of basely reconciling us with it?

A century earlier the school of the *cultists* had established a dominion, ephemeral, as it soon appeared, but absolute while it lasted. Du Bartas, who may, perhaps, as fairly as any, lay claim to its paternity,[1] had been called divine, and similar honors had been paid in turn to Gongora, Lilly, and Marini, who were in the strictest sense contemporaneous. The infection of mere fashion will hardly

[1] Its taste for verbal affectations is to be found in the *Roman de la Rose*, and (yet more absurdly forced) in Gauthier de Coinsy; but in Du Bartas the research of effect not seldom subjugates the thought as well as the phrase.

account satisfactorily for a vogue so sudden and so widely extended. It may well be suspected that there was some latent cause, something at work more potent than the fascinating mannerism of any single author in the rapid and almost simultaneous diffusion of this purely cutaneous eruption. It is not improbable that, in the revival of letters, men whose native tongues had not yet attained the precision and grace only to be acquired by long literary usage, should have learned from a study of the Latin poets to value the form above the substance, and to seek in mere words a conjuring property which belongs to them only when they catch life and meaning from profound thought or powerful emotion. Yet this very devotion to expression at the expense of everything else, though its excesses were fatal to the innovators who preached and practised it, may not have been without good results in refining language and fitting it for the higher uses to which it was destined. The *cultists* went down before the implacable good sense of French criticism, but the defect of this criticism was that it ignored imagination altogether, and sent Nature about her business as an impertinent baggage whose household loom competed unlawfully with the machine-made fabrics, so exquisitely uniform in pattern, of the royal manufactories. There is more than a fanciful analogy between the style which Pope brought into vogue and that which for a time bewitched all ears in the latter half of the sixteenth century. As the master had made it an axiom to avoid what was mean or low,

so the disciples endeavored to escape from what was common. This they contrived by the ready expedient of the periphrasis. They called everything something else. A boot with them was

> "The shining leather that encased the limb";

coffee became

> "The fragrant juice of Mocha's berry brown";

and they were as liberal of epithets as a royal christening of proper names. Two in every verse, one to balance the other, was the smallest allowance. Here are four successive verses from "The Vanity of Human Wishes": —

> "The *encumbered* oar scarce leaves the *dreaded* coast
> Through *purple* billows and a *floating* host.
> The *bold* Bavarian in a *luckless* hour
> Tries the *dread* summits of *Cæsarian* power."

This fashion perished also by its own excess, but the criticism which laid at the door of the master all the faults of his pupils was unjust. It was defective, moreover, in overlooking how much of what we call natural is an artificial product, above all in forgetting that Pope had one of the prime qualities of a great poet in exactly answering the intellectual needs of the age in which he lived, and in reflecting its lineaments. He did in some not inadequate sense hold the mirror up to nature. His poetry is not a mountain-tarn, like that of Wordsworth; it is not in sympathy with the higher moods of the mind; yet it continues entertaining, in spite of all changes of mode. It was a mirror in a drawing-room, but it gave back a faithful image

of society, powdered and rouged, to be sure, and intent on trifles, yet still as human in its own way as the heroes of Homer in theirs.

For the popularity of Pope, as for that of Marini and his sect, circumstances had prepared the way. English literature for half a century after the Restoration showed the marks both of a moral reaction and of an artistic vassalage to France. From the compulsory saintship and cropped hair of the Puritans men rushed or sneaked, as their temperaments dictated, to the opposite cant of sensuality and a wilderness of periwig. Charles II. had brought back with him from exile French manners, French morals, and above all French taste. Misfortune makes a shallow mind sceptical. It had made the king so; and this, at a time when court patronage was the main sinew of authorship, was fatal to the higher qualities of literature. That Charles should have preferred the stately decorums of the French school, and should have mistaken its polished mannerism for style, was natural enough. But there was something also in the texture of the average British mind which prepared it for this subjugation from the other side of the Channel. No observer of men can have failed to notice the clumsy respect which the understanding pays to elegance of manner and *savoir-faire*, nor what an awkward sense of inferiority it feels in the presence of an accomplished worldliness. The code of society is stronger with most persons than that of Sinai, and many a man who would not scruple to thrust his fingers in his neighbor's pocket would forego green

peas rather than use his knife as a shovel. The submission with which the greater number surrender their natural likings for the acquired taste of what for the moment is called the World is a highly curious phenomenon, and, however destructive of originality, is the main safeguard of society and nurse of civility. Any one who has witnessed the torments of an honest citizen in a foreign gallery before some hideous martyrdom which he feels it his duty to admire, though it be hateful to him as nightmare, may well doubt whether the gridiron of the saint were hotter than that of the sinner. It is only a great mind or a strong character that knows how to respect its own provincialism and can dare to be in fashion with itself. The bewildered clown with his "Am I Giles? or am I not?" was but a type of the average man who finds himself uniformed, drilled, and keeping step, whether he will or no, with the company into which destiny or chance has drafted him, and which is marching him inexorably away from everything that made him comfortable.

The insularity of England, while it fostered pride and reserve, entailed also that sensitiveness to ridicule which haunts pride like an evil genius. "The English," says Barclay, writing half a century before the Restoration, "have for the most part grave minds and withdrawn, as it were, into themselves for counsel; they wonderfully admire themselves and the manners, genius, and spirit of their own nation. In salutation or in writing they endure not (unless haply imbued with foreign man-

ners) to descend to those words of imaginary servitude which the refinement (*blandities*) of ages hath invented."[1] Yet their fondness of foreign fashions had long been the butt of native satirists. Every one remembers Portia's merry picture of the English lord: "How oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behavior everywhere." But while she laughs at his bungling efforts to make himself a cosmopolite in externals, she hints at the persistency of his inward Anglicism: "He hath neither Latin, French, nor Italian." In matters of taste the Anglo-Saxon mind seems always to have felt a painful distrust of itself, which it betrays either in an affectation of burly contempt or in a pretence of admiration equally insincere. The young lords who were to make the future court of Charles II. no doubt found in Paris an elegance beside which the homely bluntness of native manners seemed rustic and underbred. They frequented a theatre where propriety was absolute upon the stage, though license had its full swing behind the scenes. They brought home with them to England debauched morals and that urbane discipline of manners which is so agreeable a substitute for discipline of mind. The word "genteel" came back with them, an outward symptom of the inward change. In the last generation, the men whose great aim was success in the Other World had wrought a political revolution; now, those whose ideal was prosperity in This World

[1] *Barclaii Satyricon*, p. 382. Barclay had lived in France.

were to have their turn and to accomplish with their lighter weapons as great a change. Before the end of the seventeenth century John Bull was pretty well persuaded, in a bewildered kind of way, that he had been vulgar, and especially that his efforts in literature showed marks of native vigor, indeed, but of a vigor clownish and uncouth. He began to be ashamed of the provincialism which had given strength, if also something of limitation, to his character.

Waller, who spent a whole summer in polishing the life out of ten lines to be written in the Tasso of the Duchess of York, expresses the prevailing belief as regarded poetry in the prologue to his "improvement" of the "Maid's Tragedy" of Beaumont and Fletcher. He made the play *reasonable*, as it was called, and there is a pleasant satire in the fact that it was refused a license because there was an immoral king in it. On the throne, to be sure, — but on the stage! Forbid it, decency!

> "Above our neighbors' our conceptions are,
> But faultless writing is the effect of care;
> Our lines reformed, and not composed in haste,
> Polished like marble, would like marble last.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> "Were we but less indulgent to our fau'ts,
> And patience had to cultivate our thoughts,
> Our Muse would flourish, and a nobler rage
> Would honor this than did the Grecian stage."

It is a curious comment on these verses in favor of careful writing, that Waller should have failed even to express his own meaning either clearly or

with propriety. He talks of "cultivating our thoughts," when he means "pruning our style"; he confounds the Muse with the laurel, or at any rate makes her a plant, and then goes on with perfect equanimity to tell us that a nobler "rage" (that is, madness) than that of Greece would follow the horticultural devices he recommends. It never seems to have occurred to Waller that it is the substance of what you polish, and not the polish itself, that insures duration. Dryden, in his rough-and-ready way, has hinted at this in his verses to Congreve on the "Double Dealer." He begins by stating the received theory about the improvement of English literature under the new *régime*, but the thin ice of sophistry over which Waller had glided smoothly gives way under his greater weight, and he finds himself in deep water ere he is aware.

"Well, then, the promised hour has come at last,
The present age in wit obscures the past;
Strong were our sires, and as they fought they writ,
Conquering with force of arm[1] and dint of wit.
Theirs was the giant race before the Flood;
And thus when Charles returned our Empire stood;
Like Janus he the stubborn soil manured,
With rules of husbandry the rankness cured,
Tamed us to manners when the stage was rude,
And boisterous English wit with art endued;
Our age was cultivated thus at length,
But what we gained in skill we lost in strength;
Our builders were with want of genius curst,
The second temple was not like the first."

There would seem to be a manifest reminiscence of

[1] Usually printed *arms*, but Dryden certainly wrote *arm*, to correspond with *dint*, which he used in its old meaning of a downright blow.

Waller's verse in the half-scornful emphasis which Dryden lays on "cultivated." Perhaps he was at first led to give greater weight to correctness and to the restraint of arbitrary rules from a consciousness that he had a tendency to hyperbole and extravagance. But he afterwards became convinced that the heightening of discourse by passion was a very different thing from the exaggeration which heaps phrase on phrase, and that genius, like beauty, can always plead its privilege. Dryden, by his powerful example, by the charm of his verse which combines vigor and fluency in a measure perhaps never reached by any other of our poets, and above all because it is never long before the sunshine of his cheerful good sense breaks through the clouds of rhetoric, and gilds the clipped hedges over which his thought clambers like an unpruned vine, — Dryden, one of the most truly English of English authors, did more than all others combined to bring about the triumphs of French standards in taste and French principles in criticism. But he was always like a deserter who cannot feel happy in the victories of the alien arms, and who would go back if he could to the camp where he naturally belonged. Between 1660 and 1700 more French words, I believe, were directly transplanted into our language than in the century and a half since. What was of more consequence, French ideas came with them, shaping the form, and through that modifying the spirit, of our literature.

Voltaire, though he came later, was steeped in the theories of art which had been inherited as tradi-

tions of classicism from the preceding generation. He had lived in England, and, I have no doubt, gives us a very good notion of the tone which was prevalent there in his time, an English version of the criticism imported from France. He tells us that Mr. Addison was the first Englishman who had written a *reasonable* tragedy. And in spite of the growling of poor old Dennis, whose sandy pedantry was not without an oasis of refreshing sound judgment here and there, this was the opinion of most persons at that day, except, it may be suspected, the judicious and modest Mr. Addison himself. Voltaire says of the English tragedians, — and it will be noticed that he is only putting, in another way, the opinion of Dryden, — "Their productions, almost all barbarous, without polish, order, or probability, have astonishing gleams in the midst of their night; . . . it seems sometimes that nature is not made in England as it is elsewhere." *Eh bien*, the inference is that we must try and make it so! The world must be uniform in order to be comfortable, and what fashion so becoming as the one we have invented in Paris? It is not a little amusing that when Voltaire played master of ceremonies to introduce the *bizarre* Shakespeare among his countrymen, that other kind of nature made a profounder impression on them than quite pleased him. So he turned about presently and called his whilome *protégé* a buffoon.

The condition of the English mind at the close of the seventeenth century was such as to make it particularly sensitive to the magnetism which

streamed to it from Paris. The loyalty of everybody both in politics and religion had been put out of joint. A generation of materialists, by the natural rebound which inevitably follows over-tension, was to balance the ultra-spiritualism of the Puritans. As always when a political revolution has been wrought by moral agencies, the plunder had fallen mainly to the share of the greedy, selfish, and unscrupulous, whose disgusting cant had given a taint of hypocrisy to piety itself. Religion, from a burning conviction of the soul, had grown to be with both parties a political badge, as little typical of the inward man as the scallop of a pilgrim. Sincerity is impossible, unless it pervade the whole being, and the pretence of it saps the very foundation of character. There seems to have been an universal scepticism, and in its worst form, that is, with an outward conformity in the interest of decorum and order. There was an unbelief that did not believe even in itself.

The difference between the leading minds of the former age and that which was supplanting it went to the very roots of the soul. Milton was willing to peril the success of his crowning work by making the poetry of it a stalking-horse for his theological convictions. What was that Fame

> "Which the clear spirit doth raise
> To scorn delights and live laborious days,"

to the crown of a good preacher who sets

> "The hearts of men on fire
> To scorn the sordid world and unto heaven aspire"?

Dean Swift, who aspired to the mitre, could write

a book whose moral, if it had any, was that one religion was as good as another, since all were political devices, and accepted a cure of souls when it was more than doubtful whether he believed that his fellow-creatures had any souls to be saved, or, if they had, whether they were worth saving. The answer which Pulci's Margutte makes to Morgante, when asked if he believed in Christ or Mahomet, would have expressed well enough the creed of the majority of that generation: —

> "To tell thee truly,
> My faith in black 's no greater than in azure,
> But I believe in capons, roast-meat, bouilli,
> And in good wine my faith 's beyond all measure." [1]

It was a carnival of intellect without faith, when men could be Protestant or Catholic, both at once, or by turns, or neither, as suited their interest, when they could swear one allegiance and keep on safe terms with the other, when prime ministers and commanders-in-chief could be intelligencers of the Pretender, nay, when even Algernon Sidney himself could be a pensioner of France. What morality there was, was the morality of appearances, of the side that is turned toward men and not toward God. The very shamelessness of Congreve is refreshing in that age of sham.

It was impossible that anything truly great, that is, great on the moral and emotional as well as the intellectual side, should be produced by such a generation. But something intellectually great could be and was. The French mind, always

[1] *Morgante*, xviii. 115.

stronger in perceptive and analytic than in imaginative qualities, loving precision, grace, and finesse, prone to attribute an almost magical power to the scientific regulation whether of politics or religion, had brought wit and fancy and the elegant arts of society to as great perfection as was possible by the *a priori* method. Its ideal in literature was to conjure passion within the magic circle of courtliness, or to combine the appearance of careless ease and gayety of thought with intellectual exactness of statement. The eternal watchfulness of a wit that never slept had made it distrustful of the natural emotions and the unconventional expression of them, and its first question about a sentiment was, Will it be *safe?* about a phrase, Will it pass with the Academy? The effect of its example on English literature would appear chiefly in neatness and facility of turn, in point and epigrammatic compactness of phrase, and these in conveying conventional sentiments and emotions, in appealing to good society rather than to human nature. Its influence would be greatest where its success had been most marked, in what was called moral poetry, whose chosen province was manners, and in which satire, with its avenging scourge, took the place of that profounder art whose office it was to purify, not the manners, but the source of them in the soul, by pity and terror. The mistake of the whole school of French criticism, it seems to me, lay in its tendency to confound what was common with what was vulgar, in a too exclusive deference to authority at the expense of all free movement of the mind.

There are certain defects of taste which correct themselves by their own extravagance. Language, I suspect, is more apt to be reformed by the charm of some master of it, like Milton, than by any amount of precept. The influence of second-rate writers for evil is at best ephemeral, for true style, the joint result of culture and natural aptitude, is always in fashion, as fine manners always are, in whatever clothes. Perhaps some reform was needed when Quarles, who had no mean gift of poesy, could write,

> "My passion has no April in her eyes:
> I cannot spend in mists; I cannot mizzle;
> My fluent brains are too severe to drizzle
> Slight drops." [1]

Good taste is an excellent thing when it confines itself to its own rightful province of the proprieties, but when it attempts to correct those profound instincts out of whose judgments the higher principles of æsthetics have been formulated, its success is a disaster. During the era when the French theory of poetry was supreme, we notice a decline from imagination to fancy, from passion to wit, from metaphor, which fuses image and thought in one, to simile, which sets one beside the other, from the supreme code of the natural sympathies to the

[1] *Elegie on Doctor Wilson.* But if Quarles had been led astray by the vices of Donne's manner, he had good company in Herbert and Vaughan. In common with them, too, he had that luck of simpleness which is even more delightful than wit. In the same poem he says, —

> "Go, glorious soul, and lay thy temples down
> In Abram's bosom, *in the sacred down*
> *Of soft eternity.*"

parochial by-laws of etiquette. The imagination instinctively Platonizes, and it is the essence of poetry that it should be unconventional, that the soul of it should subordinate the outward parts; while the artificial method proceeds from a principle the reverse of this, making the spirit lackey the form.

Waller preaches up this new doctrine in the epilogue to the "Maid's Tragedy": —

> "Nor is 't less strange such mighty wits as those
> Should use a style in tragedy like prose;
> Well-sounding verse, where princes tread the stage,
> Should speak their virtue and describe their rage."

That it should be beneath the dignity of princes to speak in anything but rhyme can only be paralleled by Mr. Puff's law that a heroine can go decorously mad only in white satin. Waller, I suppose, though with so loose a thinker one cannot be positive, uses "describe" in its Latin sense of limitation. Fancy Othello or Lear confined to this go-cart! Phillips touches the true point when he says, "And the truth is, the use of measure alone, without any rime at all, would give more scope and liberty both to style and fancy than can possibly be observed in rime."[1] But let us test Waller's method by an example or two. His monarch made *reasonable*, thus discourses: —

> "Courage our greatest failings does supply,
> And makes all good, or handsomely we die.
> Life is a thing of common use; by heaven
> As well to insects as to monarchs given;
> But for the crown, 't is a more sacred thing;

[1] Preface to the *Theatrum*.

I 'll dying lose it, or I 'll live a king.
Come, Diphilus, we must together walk
And of a matter of importance talk." [*Exeunt.*

Blank verse, where the sentiment is trivial as here, merely removes prose to a proper ideal distance, where it is in keeping with more impassioned parts, but commonplace set to this rocking-horse jog irritates the nerves. There is nothing here to remind us of the older tragic style but the *exeunt* at the close. Its pithy conciseness and the relief which it brings us from his majesty's prosing give it an almost poetical savor. Aspatia's reflections upon suicide (or "suppressing our breath," as she calls it), in the same play, will make few readers regret that Shakespeare was left to his own unassisted barbarism when he wrote Hamlet's soliloquy on the same topic: —

"'T was in compassion of our woe
That nature first made poisons grow,
For hopeless wretches such as I
Kindly providing means to die:
As mothers do their children keep,
So Nature feeds and makes us sleep.
The indisposed she does invite
To go to bed before 't is night."

Correctness in this case is but a synonyme of monotony, and words are chosen for the number of their syllables, for their rubbishy value to fill-in, instead of being forced upon the poet by the meaning which occupies the mind. Language becomes useful for its diluting properties, rather than as the medium by means of which the thought or fancy precipitate themselves in crystals upon a

connecting thread of purpose. Let us read a few verses from Beaumont and Fletcher, that we may feel fully the difference between the rude and the reformed styles. This also shall be a speech of Aspatia's. Antiphila, one of her maidens, is working the story of Theseus and Ariadne in tapestry, for the older masters loved a picturesque background and knew the value of fanciful accessaries. Aspatia thinks the face of Ariadne not sad enough: —

> "Do it by me,
> Do it again by me, the lost Aspatia,
> And you shall find all true but the wild island.
> Suppose I stand upon the seabeach now,
> Mine arms thus, and my hair blown with the wind,
> Wild as that desert; and let all about me
> Be teachers of my story. Do my face
> (If ever thou hadst feeling of a sorrow)
> Thus, thus, Antiphila; strive to make me look
> Like sorrow's monument; and the trees about me
> Let them be dry and leafless; let the rocks
> Groan with continual surges; and behind me
> Make all a desolation."

What instinctive felicity of versification! what sobbing breaks and passionate repetitions are here!

We see what the direction of the new tendency was, but it would be an inadequate or a dishonest criticism that should hold Pope responsible for the narrow compass of the instrument which was his legacy from his immediate predecessors, any more than for the wearisome thrumming-over of his tune by those who came after him and who had caught his technical skill without his genius. The question properly stated is, How much was it possible to make of the material supplied by the age in which

he lived? and how much did he make of it? Thus far, among the great English poets who preceded him, we have seen actual life represented by Chaucer, imaginative life by Spenser, ideal life by Shakespeare, the interior life by Milton. But as everything aspires to a rhythmical utterance of itself, so conventional life, itself a new phenomenon, was waiting for its poet. It found or made a most fitting one in Pope. He stands for exactness of intellectual expression, for perfect propriety of phrase (I speak of him at his best), and is a striking instance how much success and permanence of reputation depend on conscientious finish as well as on native endowment. Butler asks, —

> "Then why should those who pick and choose
> The best of all the best compose,
> And join it by Mosaic art,
> In graceful order, part to part,
> To make the whole in beauty suit,
> Not merit as complete repute
> As those who, with less art and pain,
> Can do it with their native brain?"

Butler knew very well that precisely what stamps a man as an artist is this power of finding out what *is* "the best of all the best."

I confess that I come to the treatment of Pope with diffidence. I was brought up in the old superstition that he was the greatest poet that ever lived; and when I came to find that I had instincts of my own, and my mind was brought in contact with the apostles of a more esoteric doctrine of poetry, I felt that ardent desire for smashing the idols I had been brought up to worship, without

any regard to their artistic beauty, which characterizes youthful zeal. What was it to me that Pope was called a master of style? I felt, as Addison says in his Freeholder when answering an argument in favor of the Pretender because he could speak English and George I. could not, "that I did not wish to be tyrannized over in the best English that ever was spoken." The young demand thoughts that find an echo in their real and not their acquired nature, and care very little about the dress they are put in. It is later that we learn to like the conventional, as we do olives. There was a time when I could not read Pope, but disliked him on principle, as old Roger Ascham seems to have felt about Italy when he says, "I was once in Italy myself, but I thank God my abode there was only nine days."

But Pope fills a very important place in the history of English poetry, and must be studied by every one who would come to a clear knowledge of it. I have since read over every line that Pope ever wrote, and every letter written by or to him, and that more than once. If I have not come to the conclusion that he is the greatest of poets, I believe that I am at least in a condition to allow him every merit that is fairly his. I have said that Pope as a literary man represents precision and grace of expression; but as a poet he represents something more, — nothing less, namely, than one of those eternal controversies of taste which will last as long as the imagination and understanding divide men between them. It is not a matter to be

settled by any amount of argument or demonstration. There are born Popists or Wordsworthians, Lockists or Kantists, and there is nothing more to be said of the matter.

Wordsworth was not in a condition to do Pope justice. A man brought up in sublime mountain solitudes, and whose nature was a solitude more vast than they, walking an earth which quivered with the throe of the French Revolution, the child of an era of profound mental and moral movement, it could not be expected that he should be in sympathy with the poet of artificial life. Moreover, he was the apostle of imagination, and came at a time when the school which Pope founded had degenerated into a mob of mannerists who wrote with ease, and who with their congenial critics united at once to decry poetry which brought in the dangerous innovation of having a soul in it.

But however it may be with poets, it is very certain that a reader is happiest whose mind is broad enough to enjoy the natural school for its nature, and the artificial for its artificiality, provided they be only good of their kind. At any rate, we must allow that the man who can produce one perfect work is either a great genius or a very lucky one; and so far as we who read are concerned, it is of secondary importance which. And Pope has done this in the "Rape of the Lock." For wit, fancy, invention, and keeping, it has never been surpassed. I do not say there is in it poetry of the highest order, or that Pope is a poet whom any one would choose as the companion of his best hours. There

is no inspiration in it, no trumpet-call, but for pure entertainment it is unmatched. There are two kinds of genius. The first and highest may be said to speak out of the eternal to the present, and must compel its age to understand *it;* the second understands its age, and tells it what it wishes to be told. Let us find strength and inspiration in the one, amusement and instruction in the other, and be honestly thankful for both.

The very earliest of Pope's productions give indications of that sense and discretion, as well as wit, which afterward so eminently distinguished him. The facility of expression is remarkable, and we find also that perfect balance of metre, which he afterward carried so far as to be wearisome. His pastorals were written in his sixteenth year, and their publication immediately brought him into notice. The following four verses from his first pastoral are quite characteristic in their antithetic balance: —

> "You that, too wise for pride, too good for power,
> Enjoy the glory to be great no more,
> And carrying with you all the world can boast,
> To all the world illustriously are lost!"

The sentiment is affected, and reminds one of that future period of Pope's Correspondence with his Friends, when Swift, his heart corroding with disappointed ambition at Dublin, Bolingbroke raising delusive turnips at his farm, and Pope pretending not to feel the lampoons which imbittered his life, played together the solemn farce of affecting indifference to the world by which it would have

agonized them to be forgotten, and wrote letters addressed to each other, but really intended for that posterity whose opinion they assumed to despise.

In these pastorals there is an entire want of nature. For example, in that on the death of Mrs. Tempest: —

> "Her fate is whispered by the gentle breeze
> And told in sighs to all the trembling trees;
> The trembling trees, in every plain and wood,
> Her fate remurmur to the silver flood;
> The silver flood, so lately calm, appears
> Swelled with new passion, and o'erflows with tears;
> The winds and trees and floods her death deplore,
> Daphne, our grief! our glory now no more!"

All this is as perfectly professional as the mourning of an undertaker. Still worse, Pope materializes and makes too palpably objective that sympathy which our grief forces upon outward nature. Milton, before making the echoes mourn for Lycidas, puts our feelings in tune, as it were, and hints at his own imagination as the source of this emotion in inanimate things, —

> "But, O the heavy change now thou art gone!"

In "Windsor Forest" we find the same thing again: —

> "Here his first lays majestic Denham sung,
> There the last numbers flowed from Cowley's tongue;
> O early lost, what tears the river shed
> When the sad pomp along his banks was led!
> His drooping swans on every note expire,
> And on his willows hung each muse's lyre!"

In the same poem he indulges the absurd conceit that,

> "Beasts urged by us, their fellow-beasts pursue,
> And learn of man each other to undo";

and in the succeeding verses gives some striking instances of that artificial diction, so inappropriate to poems descriptive of natural objects and ordinary life, which brought verse-making to such a depth of absurdity in the course of the century.

"With slaughtering guns, the unwearied fowler roves
Where frosts have whitened all the naked groves;
Where doves in flocks the leafless trees o'ershade,
And lonely woodcocks haunt the watery glade;
He lifts the tube and levels with his eye,
Straight a short thunder breaks the frozen sky:
Oft as in airy rings they skim the heath,
The clamorous lapwings feel the leaden death;
Oft as the mounting larks their notes prepare,
They fall and leave their little lives in air."

Now one would imagine that the *tube* of the fowler was a telescope instead of a gun. And think of the larks preparing their notes like a country choir! Yet even here there are admirable lines, —

"Oft as in airy rings they skim the heath,"

"They fall and leave their little lives in air,"

for example.

In Pope's next poem, the "Essay on Criticism," the wit and poet become apparent. It is full of clear thoughts, compactly expressed. In this poem, written when Pope was only twenty-one, occur some of those lines which have become proverbial; such as

"A little learning is a dangerous thing";

"For fools rush in where angels fear to tread";

"True wit is Nature to advantage dressed,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed."

"For each ill author is as bad a friend."

In all of these we notice that terseness in which (regard being had to his especial range of thought) Pope has never been equalled. One cannot help being struck also with the singular *discretion* which the poem gives evidence of. I do not know where to look for another author in whom it appeared so early, and, considering the vivacity of his mind and the constantly besetting temptation of his wit, it is still more wonderful. In his boyish correspondence with poor old Wycherley, one would suppose him to be the man and Wycherley the youth. Pope's understanding was no less vigorous (when not the dupe of his nerves) than his fancy was lightsome and sprightly.

I come now to what in itself would be enough to have immortalized him as a poet, the "Rape of the Lock," in which, indeed, he appears more purely as poet than in any other of his productions. Elsewhere he has shown more force, more wit, more reach of thought, but nowhere such a truly artistic combination of elegance and fancy. His genius has here found its true direction, and the very same artificiality, which in his pastorals was unpleasing, heightens the effect, and adds to the general keeping. As truly as Shakespeare is the poet of man, as God made him, dealing with great passions and innate motives, so truly is Pope the poet of society, the delineator of manners, the exposer of those motives which may be called *acquired*, whose spring is in institutions and habits of purely worldly origin.

The "Rape of the Lock" was written in Pope's

twenty-fourth year, and the machinery of the Sylphs was added at the suggestion of Dr. Garth, — a circumstance for which we can feel a more unmixed gratitude to him than for writing the "Dispensary." The idea was taken from that entertaining book "The Count de Gabalis," in which Fouqué afterward found the hint for his "Undine"; but the little sprites as they appear in the poem are purely the creation of Pope's fancy.

The theory of the poem is excellent. The heroic is out of the question in fine society. It is perfectly true that almost every door we pass in the street closes upon its private tragedy, but the moment a *great* passion enters a man he passes at once out of the artificial into the human. So long as he continues artificial, the sublime is a conscious absurdity to him. The mock-heroic then is the only way in which the petty actions and sufferings of the fine world can be epically treated, and the contrast continually suggested with subjects of larger scope and more dignified treatment, makes no small part of the pleasure and sharpens the point of the wit. The invocation is admirable: —

> "Say, what strange motive, Goddess, could compel,
> A well-bred lord to assault a gentle belle?
> O say what stranger cause, yet unexplored,
> Could make a gentle belle reject a lord?"

The keynote of the poem is here struck, and we are able to put ourselves in tune with it. It is not a parody of the heroic style, but only a setting it in satirical juxtaposition with cares and events and

modes of thought with which it is in comical antipathy, and while *it* is not degraded, *they* are shown in their triviality. The "clouded cane," as compared with the Homeric spear, indicates the difference of scale, the lower plane of emotions and passions. The opening of the action, too, is equally good: —

"Sol through white curtains shot a timorous ray,
And oped those eyes that must eclipse the day,
Now lapdogs give themselves the rousing shake,
And sleepless lovers just at twelve awake;
Thrice rung the bell, the slipper knocked the ground,
And the pressed watch returned a silver sound."

The mythology of the Sylphs is full of the most fanciful wit; indeed, wit infused with fancy is Pope's peculiar merit. The Sylph is addressing Belinda: —

"Know, then, unnumbered spirits round thee fly,
The light militia of the lower sky;
These, though unseen, are ever on the wing,
Hang o'er the box and hover round the ring.
As now your own our beings were of old,
And once enclosed in woman's beauteous mould;
Think not, when woman's transient breath is fled,
That all her vanities at once are dead;
Succeeding vanities she still regards,
And, though she plays no more, o'erlooks the cards.
For when the fair in all their pride expire,
To their first elements their souls retire;
The sprites of fiery termagants in flame
Mount up and take a salamander's name;
Soft yielding nymphs to water glide away
And sip, with nymphs, their elemental tea;
The graver prude sinks downward to a gnome,
In search of mischief still on earth to roam;
The light coquettes in sylphs aloft repair
And sport and flutter in the fields of air."

And the contrivance by which Belinda is awakened is also perfectly in keeping with all the rest of the machinery: —

> "He said: when Shock, who thought she slept too long,
> Leaped up and waked his mistress with his tongue;
> 'T was then, Belinda, if report say true,
> Thy eyes first opened on a *billet-doux*."

Throughout this poem the satiric wit of Pope peeps out in the pleasantest little smiling ways, as where, in describing the toilet-table, he says: —

> "Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
> Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles, *billet-doux*."

Or when, after the fatal lock has been severed, —

> "Then flashed the living lightning from her eyes,
> And screams of horror rend the affrighted skies,
> Not louder shrieks to pitying Heaven are cast
> When husbands or when lapdogs breathe their last;
> Or when rich china-vessels, fallen from high,
> In glittering dust and painted fragments lie!"

And so, when the conflict begins: —

> "Now Jove suspends his golden scales in air;
> Weighs the men's wits against the ladies' hair;
> The doubtful beam long nods from side to side;
> At length the wits mount up, the hairs subside."

But more than the wit and fancy, I think, the perfect keeping of the poem deserves admiration. Except a touch of grossness, here and there, there is the most pleasing harmony in all the conceptions and images. The punishments which he assigns to the sylphs who neglect their duty are charmingly appropriate and ingenious: —

> "Whatever spirit, careless of his charge,
> His post neglects, or leaves the fair at large,

Shall feel sharp vengeance soon o'ertake his sins;
Be stopped in vials or transfixed with pins,
Or plunged in lakes of bitter washes lie,
Or wedged whole ages in a bodkin's eye;
Gums and pomatums shall his flight restrain,
While clogged he beats his silver wings in vain;
Or alum styptics with contracting power,
Shrink his thin essence like a rivelled flower;
Or as Ixion fixed the wretch shall feel
The giddy motion of the whirling wheel,
In fumes of burning chocolate shall glow,
And tremble at the sea that froths below!"

The speech of Thalestris, too, with its droll climax, is equally good: —

"Methinks already I your tears survey,
Already hear the horrid things they say,
Already see you a degraded toast,
And all your honor in a whisper lost!
How shall I then your helpless fame defend?
'T will then be infamy to seem your friend!
And shall this prize, the inestimable prize,
Exposed through crystal to the gazing eyes,
And heightened by the diamond's circling rays,
On that rapacious hand forever blaze?
Sooner shall grass in Hydepark Circus grow,
And wits take lodging in the sound of Bow,
Sooner let earth, air, sea, in chaos fall,
Men, monkeys, lapdogs, parrots, perish all!"

So also Belinda's account of the morning omens:

"'T was this the morning omens seemed to tell;
Thrice from my trembling hand the patch-box fell;
The tottering china shook without a wind;
Nay, Poll sat mute, and Shock was most unkind."

The idea of the goddess of Spleen, and of her palace, where

"The dreaded East is all the wind that blows,"

was a very happy one. In short, the whole poem

more truly deserves the name of a creation than anything Pope ever wrote. The action is confined to a world of his own, the supernatural agency is wholly of his own contrivance, and nothing is allowed to overstep the limitations of the subject. It ranks by itself as one of the purest works of human fancy; whether that fancy be strictly poetical or not is another matter. If we compare it with the "Midsummer-night's Dream," an uncomfortable doubt is suggested. The perfection of form in the "Rape of the Lock" is to me conclusive evidence that in it the natural genius of Pope found fuller and freer expression than in any other of his poems. The others are aggregates of brilliant passages rather than harmonious wholes.

It is a droll illustration of the inconsistencies of human nature, a more profound satire than Pope himself ever wrote, that his fame should chiefly rest upon the "Essay on Man." It has been praised and admired by men of the most opposite beliefs, and men of no belief at all. Bishops and free-thinkers have met here on a common ground of sympathetic approval. And, indeed, there is no particular faith in it. It is a droll medley of inconsistent opinions. It proves only two things beyond a question, — that Pope was not a great thinker; and that wherever he found a thought, no matter what, he could express it so tersely, so clearly, and with such smoothness of versification as to give it an everlasting currency. Hobbes's unwieldy Leviathan, left stranded there on the shore of the last age, and nauseous with the stench of its

selfishness, — from this Pope distilled a fragrant oil with which to fill the brilliant lamps of his philosophy, — lamps like those in the tombs of alchemists, that go out the moment the healthy air is let in upon them. The only positive doctrines in the poem are the selfishness of Hobbes set to music, and the Pantheism of Spinoza brought down from mysticism to commonplace. Nothing can be more absurd than many of the dogmas taught in this "Essay on Man." For example, Pope affirms explicitly that instinct is something better than reason: —

> "See him from Nature rising slow to art,
> To copy instinct then was reason's part;
> Thus, then, to man the voice of nature spake; —
> Go, from the creatures thy instructions take;
> Learn from the beasts what food the thickets yield;
> Learn from the birds the physic of the field;
> The arts of building from the bee receive;
> Learn of the mole to plough, the worm to weave;
> Learn of the little nautilus to sail,
> Spread the thin oar, or catch the driving gale."

I say nothing of the quiet way in which the general term "nature" is substituted for God, but how unutterably void of reasonableness is the theory that Nature would have left her highest product, man, destitute of that instinct with which she had endowed her other creatures! As if reason were not the most sublimated form of instinct. The accuracy on which Pope prided himself, and for which he is commended, was not accuracy of thought so much as of expression. And he cannot always even claim this merit, but only that of correct rhyme, as in one of the passages I have

already quoted from the "Rape of the Lock" he talks of *casting* shrieks to heaven, — a performance of some difficulty, except when *cast* is needed to rhyme with *last*.

But the supposition is that in the "Essay on Man" Pope did not himself know what he was writing. He was only the condenser and epigrammatizer of Bolingbroke, — a very fitting St. John for such a gospel. Or, if he *did* know, we can account for the contradictions by supposing that he threw in some of the commonplace moralities to conceal his real drift. Johnson asserts that Bolingbroke in private laughed at Pope's having been made the mouthpiece of opinions which he did not hold. But this is hardly probable when we consider the relations between them. It is giving Pope altogether too little credit for intelligence to suppose that he did not understand the principles of his intimate friend. The caution with which he at first concealed the authorship would argue that he had doubts as to the reception of the poem. When it was attacked on the score of infidelity, he gladly accepted Warburton's championship, and assumed whatever pious interpretation he contrived to thrust upon it. The beginning of the poem is familiar to everybody: —

> "Awake, my St. John, leave all meaner things
> To low ambition and the pride of kings;
> Let us (since life can little more supply
> Than just to look about us and to die)
> Expatiate free o'er all this scene of man,
> A mighty maze, — but not without a plan";

To expatiate *o'er* a mighty maze is rather loose

writing, but the last verse, as it stood in the original editions, was,

> "A mighty maze of walks without a plan;"

and perhaps this came nearer Pope's real opinion than the verse he substituted for it. Warburton is careful not to mention *this* variation in his notes. The poem is everywhere as remarkable for its confusion of logic as it often is for ease of verse and grace of expression. An instance of both occurs in a passage frequently quoted: —

> "Heaven from all creatures hides the book of fate;
> All but the page prescribed, their present state;
> From brutes what men, from men what spirits know,
> Or who would suffer being here below?
> The lamb thy riot dooms to bleed to-day,
> Had he thy reason, would he skip and play?
> Pleased to the last, he crops the flowery food,
> And licks the hand just raised to shed his blood.
> O, blindness to the future kindly given
> That each may fill the circle meant by heaven!
> Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,
> A hero perish or a sparrow fall,
> Atoms or systems into ruin hurled,
> And now a bubble burst, and now a world!"

Now, if "heaven from all creatures hides the book of fate," why should not the lamb "skip and play," if he had the reason of man? Why, because he would then be able to read the book of fate. But if man himself cannot, why, then, could the lamb with the reason of man? For, if the lamb had the reason of man, the book of fate would still be hidden, so far as himself was concerned. If the inferences we can draw from appearances are equivalent to a knowledge of destiny, the know-

ing enough to take an umbrella in cloudy weather might be called so. There is a manifest confusion between what we know about ourselves and about other people; the whole point of the passage being that we are always mercifully blinded to *our own* future, however much reason we may possess. There is also inaccuracy as well as inelegance in saying,

> "Heaven,
> *Who* sees with equal eye, as God of all,
> A hero perish or a sparrow fall."

To the last verse Warburton, desirous of reconciling his author with Scripture, appends a note referring to Matthew x. 29: "Are not two sparrows sold for one farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father." It would not have been safe to have referred to the thirty-first verse: "Fear ye not, therefore, *ye are of more value* than many sparrows."

To my feeling, one of the most beautiful passages in the whole poem is that familiar one: —

> "Lo, the poor Indian whose untutored mind
> Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind,
> His soul proud science never taught to stray
> Far as the solar walk or milky way:
> Yet simple Nature to his hope has given
> Behind the cloud-topt hill a humbler heaven;
> Some safer world in depth of woods embraced,
> Some happier island in the watery waste,
> Where slaves once more their native land behold,
> No fiends torment, no Christians thirst for gold.
> To *be* contents his natural desire,
> He asks no angel's wing, no seraph's fire,
> But thinks, admitted to that equal sky,
> His faithful dog shall bear him company."

But this comes in as a corollary to what went just before: —

> "Hope springs eternal in the human breast,
> Man never is but always to be blest;
> The soul, uneasy, and confined from home,
> Rests and expatiates in a life to come."

Then follows immediately the passage about the poor Indian, who, after all, it seems, is contented with merely *being*, and whose soul, therefore, is an exception to the general rule. And what have the "solar walk" (as he calls it) and "milky way" to do with the affair? Does our hope of heaven depend on our knowledge of astronomy? Or does he mean that science and faith are necessarily hostile? And, after being told that it is the "untutored mind" of the savage which "sees God in clouds and hears him in the wind," we are rather surprised to find that the lesson the poet intends to teach is that

> "All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
> Whose body Nature is, and God the soul,
> That, changed through all, and yet in all the same,
> Great in the earth, as in the ethereal frame,
> Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
> Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees."

So that we are no better off than the untutored Indian, after the poet has tutored us. Dr. Warburton makes a rather lame attempt to ward off the charge of Spinozism from this last passage. He would have found it harder to show that the acknowledgment of any divine revelation would not overturn the greater part of its teachings. If Pope intended by his poem all that the bishop

takes for granted in his commentary, we must deny him what is usually claimed as his first merit, — clearness. If he did *not*, we grant him clearness as a writer at the expense of sincerity as a man. Perhaps a more charitable solution of the difficulty would be, that Pope's precision of thought was no match for the fluency of his verse.

Lord Byron goes so far as to say, in speaking of Pope, that he who executes the best, no matter what his department, will rank the highest. I think there are enough indications in these letters of Byron's, however, that they were written rather more against Wordsworth than for Pope. The rule he lays down would make Voltaire a greater poet, in some respects, than Shakespeare. Byron cites Petrarch as an example; yet if Petrarch had put nothing more into his sonnets than *execution*, there are plenty of Italian sonneteers who would be his match. But, in point of fact, the department chooses the man and not the man the department, and it has a great deal to do with our estimate of him. Is the department of Milton no higher than that of Butler? Byron took especial care not to write in the style he commended. But I think Pope has received quite as much credit in respect even of execution as he deserves. Surely execution is not confined to versification alone. What can be worse than this?

> "At length Erasmus, that great, injured name,
> (The glory of the priesthood and the shame,)
> Stemmed the wild torrent of a barbarous age,
> And drove those holy vandals off the stage."

It would have been hard for Pope to have found a prettier piece of confusion in any of the small authors he laughed at than this image of a great, injured name stemming a torrent and driving vandals off the stage. And in the following verses the image is helplessly confused: —

> "Kind self-conceit to some her glass applies,
> Which no one looks in with another's eyes,
> But, as the flatterer or dependant paint,
> Beholds himself a patriot, chief, or saint."

The use of the word "applies" is perfectly un-English; and it seems that people who look in this remarkable glass see their pictures and not their reflections. Often, also, when Pope attempts the sublime, his epithets become curiously unpoetical, as where he says, in the Dunciad,

> "As, one by one, at dread Medea's strain,
> The sickening stars fade off *the ethereal plain*."

And not seldom he is satisfied with the music of the verse without much regard to fitness of imagery; in the "Essay on Man," for example: —

> "Passions, like elements, though born to fight,
> Yet, mixed and softened, in his work unite;
> These 't is enough to temper and employ;
> But what composes man can man destroy?
> Suffice that Reason keep to Nature's road,
> Subject, compound them, follow her and God.
> Love, Hope, and Joy, fair Pleasure's smiling train,
> Hate, Fear, and Grief, the family of Pain,
> These, mixed with Art, and to due bounds confined,
> Make and maintain the balance of the mind."

Here reason is represented as an apothecary compounding pills of "pleasure's smiling train" and the "family of pain." And in the Moral Essays,

"Know God and Nature only are the same;
In man the judgment shoots at flying game,
A bird of passage, gone as soon as found,
Now in the moon, perhaps, now under ground."

The "judgment shooting at flying game" is an odd image enough; but I think a bird of passage, now in the moon and now under ground, could be found nowhere — out of Goldsmith's Natural History, perhaps. An epigrammatic expression will also tempt him into saying something without basis in truth, as where he ranks together "Macedonia's madman and the Swede," and says that neither of them "looked forward farther than his nose," a slang phrase which may apply well enough to Charles XII., but certainly not to the pupil of Aristotle, who showed himself capable of a large political forethought. So, too, the rhyme, if correct, is a sufficient apology for want of propriety in phrase, as where he makes "Socrates *bleed*."

But it is in his Moral Essays and parts of his Satires that Pope deserves the praise which he himself desired: —

"Happily to steer
From grave to gay, from lively to severe,
Correct with spirit, eloquent with ease,
Intent to reason, or polite to please."

Here Pope must be allowed to have established a style of his own, in which he is without a rival. One can open upon wit and epigram at any page.

"Behold, if Fortune or a mistress frowns,
Some plunge in business, other shave their crowns;
To ease the soul of one oppressive weight,
This quits an empire, that embroils a state;

> The same adust complexion has impelled,
> Charles to the convent, Philip to the field."

Indeed, I think one gets a little tired of the invariable *this* set off by the inevitable *that*, and wishes antithesis would let him have a little quiet now and then. In the first couplet, too, the conditional "frown" would have been more elegant. But taken as detached passages, how admirably the different characters are drawn, so admirably that half the verses have become proverbial. This of Addison will bear reading again: —

> "Peace to all such; but were there one whose fires
> True genius kindles and fair fame inspires;
> Blest with each talent and each art to please,
> And born to write, converse, and live with ease;
> Should such a man, too fond to rule alone,
> Bear like the Turk no brother near the throne,
> View him with scornful yet with jealous eyes,
> And hate for arts that caused himself to rise,
> Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
> And, without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;
> Willing to wound and yet afraid to strike,
> Just hint a fault and hesitate dislike,
> Alike reserved to blame or to commend,
> A timorous foe and a suspicious friend;
> Dreading e'en fools, by flatterers besieged,
> And *so* obliging that he ne'er obliged;
> Like Cato give his little Senate laws,
> And sit attentive to his own applause,
> While wits and templars every sentence raise,
> And wonder with a foolish face of praise; —
> Who but must laugh if such a man there be?
> Who would not weep if Atticus were he?"

With the exception of the somewhat technical image in the second verse of Fame blowing the fire of genius, which too much puts us in mind of the

frontispieces of the day, surely nothing better of its kind was ever written. How applicable it was to Addison I shall consider in another place. As an accurate intellectual observer and describer of personal weaknesses, Pope stands by himself in English verse.

In his epistle on the characters of women, no one who has ever known a noble woman, nay, I should almost say no one who ever had a mother or sister, will find much to please him. The climax of his praise rather degrades than elevates.

> "O, blest in temper, whose unclouded ray
> Can make to-morrow cheerful as to-day,
> She who can love a sister's charms, or hear
> Sighs for a daughter with unwounded ear,
> She who ne'er answers till a husband cools,
> Or, if she rules him, never shows she rules,
> Charms by accepting, by submitting sways,
> Yet has her humor most when she obeys;
> Lets fops or fortune fly which way they will,
> Disdains all loss of tickets or codille,
> Spleen, vapors, or smallpox, above them all
> And mistress of herself, though china fall."

The last line is very witty and pointed, — but consider what an ideal of womanly nobleness he must have had, who praises his heroine for not being jealous of her daughter. Addison, in commending Pope's "Essay on Criticism," says, speaking of us "who live in the latter ages of the world": "We have little else to do left us but to represent the *common sense* of mankind, in more strong, more beautiful, or more uncommon lights." I think he has here touched exactly the point of Pope's merit, and, in doing so, tacitly excludes him from the

position of poet, in the highest sense. Take two of Jeremy Taylor's prose sentences about the Countess of Carbery, the lady in Milton's "Comus": "The religion of this excellent lady was of another constitution: it took root downward in humility, and brought forth fruit upward in the substantial graces of a Christian, in charity and justice, in chastity and modesty, in fair friendships and sweetness of society. . . . And though she had the greatest judgment, and the greatest experience of things and persons I ever yet knew in a person of her youth and sex and circumstances, yet, as if she knew nothing of it, she had the meanest opinion of herself, and like a fair taper, when she shined to all the room, yet round about her station she had cast a shadow and a cloud, and she shined to everybody but herself." *This* is poetry, though not in verse. The plays of the elder dramatists are not without examples of weak and vile women, but they are not without noble ones either. Take these verses of Chapman, for example: —

"Let no man value at a little price
A virtuous woman's counsel: her winged spirit
Is feathered oftentimes with noble words
And, like her beauty, ravishing and pure;
The weaker body, still the stronger soul.
O, what a treasure is a virtuous wife,
Discreet and loving. Not one gift on earth
Makes a man's life so nighly bound to heaven.
She gives him double forces to endure
And to enjoy, being one with him,
Feeling his joys and griefs with equal sense:
If he fetch sighs, she draws her breath as short;
If he lament, she melts herself in tears;
If he be glad, she triumphs; if he stir,

> She moves his way, in all things his sweet ape,
> Himself divinely varied without change.
> All store without her leaves a man but poor,
> And with her poverty is exceeding store."

Pope in the characters I have read was drawing his ideal woman, for he says at the end that she shall be his muse. The sentiments are those of a *bourgeois* and of the back parlor, more than of the poet and the muse's bower. A man's mind is known by the company it keeps.

Now it is very possible that the women of Pope's time were as bad as they could be; but if God made poets for anything, it was to keep alive the traditions of the pure, the holy, and the beautiful. I grant the influence of the age, but there is a sense in which the poet is of no age, and Beauty, driven from every other home, will never be an outcast and a wanderer, while there is a poet's nature left, will never fail of the tribute at least of a song. It seems to me that Pope had a sense of the neat rather than of the beautiful. His nature delighted more in detecting the blemish than in enjoying the charm.

However great his merit in expression, I think it impossible that a true poet could have written such a satire as the Dunciad, which is even nastier than it is witty. It is filthy even in a filthy age, and Swift himself could not have gone beyond some parts of it. One's mind needs to be sprinkled with some disinfecting fluid after reading it. I do not remember that any other poet ever made poverty a crime. And it is wholly without discrimination. De Foe is set in the pillory forever; and George

Wither, the author of that charming poem, "Fair Virtue," classed among the dunces. And was it not in this age that loose Dick Steele paid his wife the finest compliment ever paid to woman, when he said "that to love her was a liberal education"?

Even in the "Rape of the Lock," the fancy is that of a wit rather than of a poet. It might not be just to compare his Sylphs with the Fairies of Shakespeare; but contrast the kind of fancy shown in the poem with that of Drayton's Nymphidia, for example. I will give one stanza of it, describing the palace of the Fairy: —

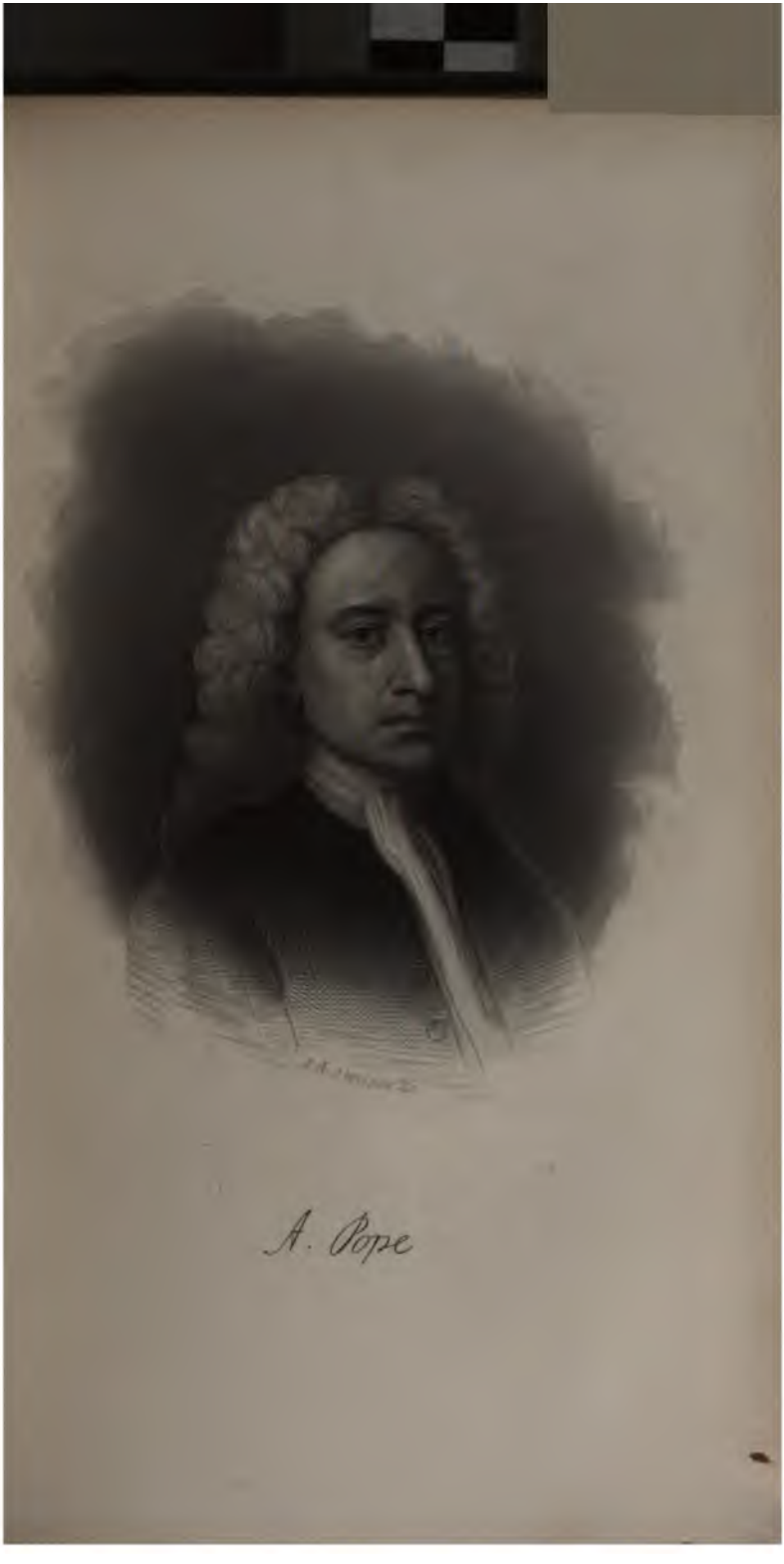
> "The walls of spider's legs were made,
> Well mortised, and finely laid;
> (He was the master of his trade
> It curiously that builded:)
> The windows of the eyes of cats,
> And, for the roof, instead of slats
> 'T is covered with the skins of bats,
> With moonshine that are gilded."

In the last line the eye and fancy of a poet are recognized.

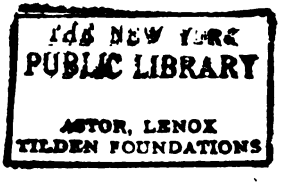
Personally we know more about Pope than about any of our poets. He kept no secrets about himself. If he did not let the cat out of the bag, he always contrived to give her tail a wrench so that we might know she was there. In spite of the savageness of his satires, his natural disposition seems to have been an amiable one, and his character as an author was as purely factitious as his style. Dr. Johnson appears to have suspected his sincerity; but artifice more than insincerity lay at the basis of his character. I think that there was very little real malice

in him, and that his "evil was wrought from want of thought." When Dennis was old and poor, he wrote a prologue for a play to be acted for his benefit. Except Addison, he numbered among his friends the most illustrious men of his time.

The correspondence of Pope is, on the whole, less interesting than that of any other eminent English poet, except that of Southey, and their letters have the same fault of being labored compositions. Southey's are, on the whole, the more agreeable of the two, for they inspire one (as Pope's certainly do not) with a sincere respect for the character of the writer. Pope's are altogether too full of the proclamation of his own virtues to be pleasant reading. It is plain that they were mostly addressed to the public, perhaps even to posterity. But letters, however carefully drilled to be circumspect, are sure to blab, and those of Pope leave in the reader's mind an unpleasant feeling of circumspection, — of an attempt to look as an eminent literary character should rather than as the man really was. They have the unnatural constraint of a man in full dress sitting for his portrait and endeavoring to look his best. We never catch him, if he can help it, at unawares. Among all Pope's correspondents, Swift shows in the most dignified and, one is tempted to say, the most amiable light. It is creditable to the Dean that the letters which Pope addressed to him are by far the most simple and straightforward of any that he wrote. No sham could encounter those terrible eyes in Dublin without wincing. I think, on the whole, that a



A. Pope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revision of judgment would substitute "discomforting consciousness of the public" for "insincerity" in judging Pope's character by his letters. He could not shake off the habits of the author, and never, or almost never, in prose, acquired that knack of seeming carelessness that makes Walpole's elaborate compositions such agreeable reading. Pope would seem to have kept a commonplace book of phrases proper to this or that occasion; and he transfers a compliment, a fine moral sentiment, nay, even sometimes a burst of passionate ardor, from one correspondent to another, with the most cold-blooded impartiality. Were it not for this curious economy of his, no one could read his letters to Lady Wortley Montagu without a conviction that they were written by a lover. Indeed, I think nothing short of the *spretæ injuria formæ* will account for (though it will not excuse) the savage vindictiveness he felt and showed towards her. It may be suspected also that the bitterness of caste added gall to his resentment. His enemy wore that impenetrable armor of superior rank which rendered her indifference to his shafts the more provoking that it was unaffected. Even for us his satire loses its sting when we reflect that it is not in human nature for a woman to have had two such utterly irreconcilable characters as those of Lady Mary before and after her quarrel with the poet. In any view of Pope's conduct in this affair, there is an ill savor in his attempting to degrade a woman whom he had once made sacred with his love. Spenser touches the right chord when he says of the Rosalinde who had rejected him,

"Not, then, to her, that scornéd thing so base,
But to myself the blame, that lookt so high;
Yet so much grace let her vouchsafe to grant
To simple swain, sith her I may not love,
Yet that I may her honor paravant
And praise her worth, though far my wit above;
Such grace shall be some guerdon of the grief
And long affliction which I have endured."

In his correspondence with Aaron Hill, Pope, pushed to the wall, appears positively mean. He vainly endeavors to show that his personalities had all been written in the interests of literature and morality, and from no selfish motive. But it is hard to believe that Theobald would have been deemed worthy of his disgustful preëminence but for the manifest superiority of his edition of Shakespeare, or that Addison would have been so adroitly disfigured unless through wounded self-love. It is easy to conceive the resentful shame which Pope must have felt when Addison so almost contemptuously disavowed all complicity in his volunteer defence of *Cato* in a brutal assault on Dennis. Pope had done a mean thing to propitiate a man whose critical judgment he dreaded; and the great man, instead of thanking him, had resented his interference as impertinent. In the whole portrait of Atticus one cannot help feeling that Pope's satire is not founded on knowledge, but rather on what his own sensitive suspicion divined of the opinions of one whose expressed preferences in poetry implied a condemnation of the very grounds of the satirist's own popularity. We shall not so easily give up the purest and most dignified figure of that some-

what vulgar generation, who ranks with Sidney and Spenser as one of the few perfect gentlemen in our literary annals. A man who could command the unswerving loyalty of honest and impulsive Dick Steele could not have been a coward or a backbiter. The only justification alleged by Pope was of the flimsiest kind, namely, that Addison regretted the introduction of the sylphs in the second edition of the "Rape of the Lock," saying that the poem was *merum sal* before. Let any one ask himself how he likes an author's emendations of any poem to which his ear had adapted itself in its former shape, and he will hardly think it needful to charge Addison with any mean motive for his conservatism in this matter. One or two of Pope's letters are so good as to make us regret that he did not oftener don the dressing-gown and slippers in his correspondence. One in particular, to Lord Burlington, describing a journey on horseback to Oxford with Lintot the bookseller, is full of a lightsome humor worthy of Cowper, almost worthy of Gray.

Joseph Warton, in summing up at the end of his essay on the genius and writings of Pope, says that the largest part of his works "is of the *didactic*, *moral*, and *satiric*; and, consequently, not of the most *poetic* species of *poetry*; whence it is manifest that *good sense* and *judgment* were his characteristical excellences rather than *fancy* and *invention*." It is plain that in any strict definition there can be only one kind of poetry, and that what Warton really meant to say was that Pope was not a poet at all. This, I think, is shown by what

Johnson says in his "Life of Pope," though he does not name Warton. The dispute on this point went on with occasional lulls for more than a half-century after Warton's death. It was renewed with peculiar acrimony when the Rev. W. L. Bowles diffused and confused Warton's critical opinions in his own peculiarly helpless way in editing a new edition of Pope in 1806. Bowles entirely mistook the functions of an editor, and maladroitly entangled his judgment of the poetry with his estimate of the author's character.[1] Thirteen years later, Campbell, in his "Specimens," controverted Mr. Bowles's estimate of Pope's character and position, both as man and poet. Mr. Bowles replied in a letter to Campbell on what he called "the invariable principles of poetry." This letter was in turn somewhat sharply criticised by Gilchrist in the Quarterly Review. Mr. Bowles made an angry and unmannerly retort, among other things charging Gilchrist with the crime of being a tradesman's son, whereupon the affair became what they call on the frontier a free fight, in which Gilchrist, Roscoe, the elder Disraeli, and Byron took part with equal relish, though with various fortune. The last shot, in what had grown into a thirty years' war, between the partisans of what

[1] Bowles's *Sonnets*, wellnigh forgotten now, did more than his controversial writings for the cause he advocated. Their influence upon the coming generation was great (greater than we can well account for) and beneficial. Coleridge tells us that he made forty copies of them while at Christ's Hospital. Wordsworth's prefaces first made imagination the true test of poetry, in its more modern sense. But they drew little notice till later.

was called the Old School of poetry and those of the New, was fired by Bowles in 1826. Bowles, in losing his temper, lost also what little logic he had, and though, in a vague way, æsthetically right, contrived always to be argumentatively wrong. Anger made worse confusion in a brain never very clear, and he had neither the scholarship nor the critical faculty for a vigorous exposition of his own thesis. Never was wilder hitting than his, and he laid himself open to dreadful punishment, especially from Byron, whose two letters are masterpieces of polemic prose. Bowles most happily exemplified in his own pamphlets what was really the turning-point of the whole controversy (though all the combatants more or less lost sight of it or never saw it), namely, that without clearness and terseness there could be no good writing, whether in prose or verse; in other words that, while precision of phrase presupposes lucidity of thought, yet good writing is an art as well as a gift. Byron alone saw clearly that here was the true knot of the question, though, as his object was mainly mischief, he was not careful to loosen it. The sincerity of Byron's admiration of Pope has been, it seems to me, too hastily doubted. What he admired in him was that patience in careful finish which he felt to be wanting in himself and in most of his contemporaries. Pope's assailants went so far as to make a defect of what, rightly considered, was a distinguished merit, though the amount of it was exaggerated. The weak point in the case was that his nicety concerned itself wholly about the phrase,

leaving the thought to be as faulty as it would, and that it seldom extended beyond the couplet, often not beyond a single verse. His serious poetry, therefore, at its best, is a succession of loosely strung epigrams, and no poet more often than he makes the second line of the couplet a mere train-bearer to the first. His more ambitious works may be defined as careless thinking carefully versified. Lessing was one of the first to see this, and accordingly he tells us that "his great, I will not say greatest, merit lay in what we call the mechanic of poetry."[1] Lessing, with his usual insight, parenthetically qualifies his statement; for where Pope, as in the "Rape of the Lock," found a subject exactly level with his genius, he was able to make what, taken for all in all, is the most perfect poem in the language.

It will hardly be questioned that the man who writes what is still piquant and rememberable, a century and a quarter after his death, was a man of genius. But there are two modes of uttering such things as cleave to the memory of mankind. They may be said or sung. I do not think that Pope's verse anywhere sings, but it should seem that the abiding presence of fancy in his best work forbids his exclusion from the rank of poet. The atmosphere in which he habitually dwelt was an essentially prosaic one, the language habitual to him was that of conversation and society, so that he lacked the help of that fresher dialect which seems like

[1] *Briefe die neueste Litteratur betreffend*, 1759, ii. Brief. See also his more elaborate criticism of the *Essay on Man* (*Pope ein Metaphysiker*), 1755.

inspiration in the elder poets. His range of associations was of that narrow kind which is always vulgar, whether it be found in the village or the court. Certainly he has not the force and majesty of Dryden in his better moods, but he has a grace, a finesse, an art of being pungent, a sensitiveness to impressions, that would incline us to rank him with Voltaire (whom in many ways he so much resembles), as an author with whom the gift of writing was primary, and that of verse secondary. No other poet that I remember ever wrote prose which is so purely prose as his ; and yet, in any impartial criticism, the " Rape of the Lock " sets him even as a poet far above many men more largely endowed with poetic feeling and insight than he.

A great deal must be allowed to Pope for the age in which he lived, and not a little, I think, for the influence of Swift. In his own province he still stands unapproachably alone. If to be the greatest satirist of individual men, rather than of human nature, if to be the highest expression which the life of the court and the ball-room has ever found in verse, if to have added more phrases to our language than any other but Shakespeare, if to have charmed four generations make a man a great poet, — then he is one. He was the chief founder of an artificial style of writing, which in his hands was living and powerful, because he used it to express artificial modes of thinking and an artificial state of society. Measured by any high standard of imagination, he will be found wanting ; tried by any test of wit, he is unrivalled.

MILTON[1]

[1872]

If the biographies of literary men are to assume the bulk which Mr. Masson is giving to that of Milton, their authors should send a phial of *elixir vitæ* with the first volume, that a purchaser might have some valid assurance of surviving to see the last. Mr. Masson has already occupied thirteen hundred and seventy-eight pages in getting Milton to his thirty-fifth year, and an interval of eleven years stretches between the dates of the first and second instalments of his published labors. As Milton's literary life properly begins at twenty-one, with the "Ode on the Nativity," and as by far the more important part of it lies between the year at which we are arrived and his death at the age of sixty-six, we might seem to have the terms given us by which to make a rough reckoning of how soon

[1] *The Life of John Milton:* narrated in Connection with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of his Time. By David Masson, M. A., LL. D., Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature in the University of Edinburgh. Vols. i., ii. 1638-1643. London and New York: Macmillan & Co. 1871. 8vo. pp. xii, 608.

The Poetical Works of John Milton, edited, with Introduction, Notes, and an Essay on Milton's English, by David Masson, M. A., LL. D., Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature in the University of Edinburgh. 3 vols. 8vo. Macmillan & Co. 1874.

we are likely to see land. But when we recollect the baffling character of the winds and currents we have already encountered, and the eddies that may at any time slip us back to the reformation in Scotland or the settlement of New England; when we consider, moreover, that Milton's life overlapped the *grand siècle* of French literature, with its irresistible temptations to digression and homily for a man of Mr. Masson's temperament, we may be pardoned if a sigh of doubt and discouragement escape us. We envy the secular leisures of Methuselah, and are thankful that *his* biography at least (if written in the same longeval proportion) is irrecoverably lost to us. What a subject would that have been for a person of Mr. Masson's spacious predilections! Even if he himself can count on patriarchal prorogations of existence, let him hang a print of the Countess of Desmond in his study to remind him of the ambushes which Fate lays for the toughest of us. For myself, I have not dared to climb a cherry-tree since I began to read his work. Even with the promise of a speedy third volume before me, I feel by no means sure of living to see Mary Powell back in her husband's house; for it is just at this crisis that Mr. Masson, with the diabolical art of a practised serial writer, leaves us while he goes into an exhaustive account of the Westminster Assembly and the political and religious notions of the Massachusetts Puritans. One could not help thinking, after having got Milton fairly through college, that he was never more mistaken in his life than when he wrote,

> "How *soon* hath Time, that subtle thief of youth,
> Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year!"

Or is it Mr. Masson who has scotched Time's wheels?

It is plain from the Preface to the second volume that Mr. Masson himself has an uneasy consciousness that something is wrong, and that Milton ought somehow to be more than a mere incident of his own biography. He tells us that, "whatever may be thought by a hasty person looking in on the subject from the outside, no one can study the life of Milton as it ought to be studied without being obliged to study extensively and intimately the contemporary history of England, and even incidentally of Scotland and Ireland too. . . . Thus on the very compulsion, or at least the suasion, of the biography, a history grew on my hands. It was not in human nature to confine the historical inquiries, once they were in progress, within the precise limits of their demonstrable bearing on the biography, even had it been possible to determine these limits beforehand; and so the history assumed a coördinate importance with me, was pursued often for its own sake, and became, though always with a sense of organic relation to the biography, continuous in itself." If a "hasty person" be one who thinks eleven years rather long to have his button held by a biographer ere he begin his next sentence, I take to myself the sting of Mr. Masson's covert sarcasm. I confess with shame a pusillanimity that is apt to flag if a "to be continued" do not redeem its promise before the lapse of

a quinquennium. I could scarce await the "Autocrat" himself so long. The heroic age of literature is past, and even a duodecimo may often prove too heavy (οἷοι νῦν βροτοί) for the descendants of men to whom the folio was a pastime. But what does Mr. Masson mean by "continuous"? To me it seems rather as if his somewhat rambling history of the seventeenth century were interrupted now and then by an unexpected apparition of Milton, who, like Paul Pry, just pops in and hopes he does not intrude, to tell us what *he* has been doing in the mean while. The reader, immersed in Scottish politics or the schemes of Archbishop Laud, is a little puzzled at first, but reconciles himself on being reminded that this fair-haired young man is the protagonist of the drama. *Pars minima est ipsa puella sui.*

If Goethe was right in saying that every man was a citizen of his age as well as of his country, there can be no doubt that in order to understand the motives and conduct of the man we must first make ourselves intimate with the time in which he lived. We have therefore no fault to find with the thoroughness of Mr. Masson's "historical inquiries." The more thorough the better, so far as they were essential to the satisfactory performance of his task. But it is only such contemporary events, opinions, or persons as were really operative on the character of the man we are studying that are of consequence, and we are to familiarize ourselves with them, not so much for the sake of explaining as of understanding him. The biographer, especially of

a literary man, need only mark the main currents of tendency, without being officious to trace out to its marshy source every runlet that has cast in its tiny pitcherful with the rest. Much less should he attempt an analysis of the stream and to classify every component by itself, as if each were ever effectual singly and not in combination. Human motives cannot be thus chemically cross-examined, nor do we arrive at any true knowledge of character by such minute subdivision of its ingredients. Nothing is so essential to a biographer as an eye that can distinguish at a glance between real events that are the levers of thought and action, and what Donne calls "unconcerning things, matters of fact," — between substantial personages, whose contact or even neighborhood is influential, and the supernumeraries that serve first to fill up a stage and afterwards the interstices of a biographical dictionary.

> "Time hath a wallet at his back
> Wherein he puts alms for Oblivion."

Let the biographer keep his fingers off that sacred and merciful deposit, and not renew for us the bores of a former generation as if we had not enough of our own. But if he cannot forbear that unwise inquisitiveness, we may fairly complain when he insists on taking us along with him in the processes of his investigation, instead of giving us the sifted results in their bearing on the life and character of his subject, whether for help or hindrance. We are blinded with the dust of old papers ransacked by Mr. Masson to find out that they have no relation whatever to his hero. He had been wise

if he had kept constantly in view what Milton himself says of those who gathered up personal traditions concerning the Apostles: "With less fervency was studied what Saint Paul or Saint John had written than was listened to one that could say, 'Here he taught, here he stood, this was his stature, and thus he went habited; and O, happy this house that harbored him, and that cold stone whereon he rested, this village where he wrought such a miracle.' . . . Thus while all their thoughts were poured out upon circumstances and the gazing after such men as had sat at table with the Apostles, . . . by this means they lost their time and truanted on the fundamental grounds of saving knowledge, as was seen shortly in their writings." Mr. Masson has so *poured out his mind upon circumstances*, that his work reminds us of Allston's picture of Elijah in the Wilderness, where a good deal of research at last enables us to guess at the prophet absconded liked a conundrum in the landscape where the very ravens could scarce have found him out, except by divine commission. The figure of Milton becomes but a speck on the enormous canvas crowded with the scenery through which he may by any possibility be conjectured to have passed. I will cite a single example of the desperate straits to which Mr. Masson is reduced in order to hitch Milton on to his own biography. He devotes the first chapter of his Second Book to the meeting of the Long Parliament. "Already," he tells us, "in the earlier part of the day, the Commons had gone through the ceremony of hearing the writ for the Parliament read, and

the names of the members that had been returned called over by Thomas Wyllys, Esq., the Clerk of the Crown in Chancery. His deputy, *Agar, Milton's brother-in-law, may have been in attendance on such an occasion.* During the preceding month or two, *at all events*, Agar and his subordinates in the Crown Office had been unusually busy with the issue of the writs and with the other work connected with the opening of Parliament." (Vol. ii. p. 150.) Mr. Masson's resolute "at all events" is very amusing. Meanwhile

"The hungry sheep look up and are not fed."

Augustine Thierry has a great deal to answer for, if to him we owe the modern fashion of writing history picturesquely. At least his method leads to most unhappy results when essayed by men to whom nature has denied a sense of what the picturesque really is. The historical picturesque does not consist in truth of costume and similar accessaries, but in the grouping, attitude, and expression of the figures, caught when they are unconscious that the artist is sketching them. The moment they are posed for a composition, unless by a man of genius, the life has gone out of them. In the hands of an inferior artist, who fancies that imagination is something to be squeezed out of color-tubes, the past becomes a phantasmagoria of jack-boots, doublets, and flap-hats, the mere property-room of a deserted theatre, as if the light had been scenical and illusory, the world an unreal thing that vanished with the foot-lights. It is the power of catching the actors in great events at unawares that

makes the glimpses given us by contemporaries so vivid and precious. And St. Simon, one of the great masters of the picturesque, lets us into the secret of his art when he tells us how, in that wonderful scene of the death of Monseigneur, he saw "*du premier coup d'œil vivement porté*, tout ce qui leur échappoit et tout ce qui les accableroit." It is the gift of producing this reality that almost makes us blush, as if we had been caught peeping through a keyhole, and had surprised secrets to which we had no right, — it is this only that can justify the pictorial method of narration. Mr. Carlyle has this power of contemporizing himself with bygone times, he cheats us to

> "Play with our fancies and believe we see";

but we find the *tableaux vivants* of the apprentices who "deal in his command without his power," and who compel us to work very hard indeed with our fancies, rather wearisome. The effort of weaker arms to shoot with his mighty bow has filled the air of recent literature with more than enough fruitless twanging.

Mr. Masson's style, at best cumbrous, becomes intolerably awkward when he strives to make up for the want of St. Simon's *premier coup d'œil* by impertinent details of what we must call the pseudo-dramatic kind. For example, does Hall profess to have traced Milton from the University to a "suburb sink" of London? Mr. Masson fancies he hears Milton saying to himself, "A suburb sink! has Hall or his son taken the trouble to walk all the

way down to Aldersgate here, to peep up the entry where I live, and so have an exact notion of my whereabouts? There has been plague in the neighborhood certainly; and I hope Jane Yates had my doorstep tidy for the visit." Does Milton, answering Hall's innuendo that he was courting the graces of a rich widow, tell us that he would rather "choose a virgin of mean fortunes honestly bred"? Mr. Masson forthwith breaks forth in a paroxysm of what we suppose to be picturesqueness in this wise: "What have we here? Surely nothing less, if we choose so to construe it, than a marriage advertisement! Ho, all ye virgins of England (widows need not apply), here is an opportunity such as seldom occurs: a bachelor, unattached; age, thirty-three years and three or four months; height [Milton, by the way, would have said *highth*] middle or a little less; personal appearance unusually handsome, with fair complexion and light auburn hair; circumstances independent; tastes intellectual and decidedly musical; principles Root-and-Branch! Was there already any young maiden in whose bosom, had such an advertisement come in her way, it would have raised a conscious flutter? If so, did she live near Oxford?" If there *is* anything worse than an unimaginative man trying to write imaginatively, it is a heavy man when he fancies he is being facetious. He tramples out the last spark of cheerfulness with the broad damp foot of a hippopotamus.

I am no advocate of what is called the dignity of history, when it means, as it too often does, that

dulness has a right of sanctuary in gravity. Too well do I recall the sorrows of my youth, when I was shipped in search of knowledge on the long Johnsonian swell of the last century, favorable to anything but the calm digestion of historic truth. I had even then an uneasy suspicion, which has ripened into certainty, that thoughts were never draped in long skirts like babies, if they were strong enough to go alone. But surely there should be such a thing as good taste, above all a sense of self-respect, in the historian himself, that should not allow him to play any tricks with the dignity of his subject. A halo of sacredness has hitherto invested the figure of Milton, and our image of him has dwelt securely in ideal remoteness from the vulgarities of life. No diaries, no private letters, remain to give the idle curiosity of after-times the right to force itself on the hallowed seclusion of his reserve. That a man whose familiar epistles were written in the language of Cicero, whose sense of personal dignity was so great that, when called on in self-defence to speak of himself, he always does it with an epical stateliness of phrase, and whose self-respect even in youth was so profound that it resembles the reverence paid by other men to a far-off and idealized character, — that he should be treated in this off-hand familiar fashion by his biographer seems to us a kind of desecration, a violation of good manners no less than of the laws of biographic art. Milton is the last man in the world to be slapped on the back with impunity. Better the surly injustice of Johnson than such

presumptuous friendship as this. Let the seventeenth century, at least, be kept sacred from the insupportable foot of the interviewer!

But Mr. Masson, in his desire to be (shall I say) idiomatic, can do something worse than what has been hitherto quoted. He can be even vulgar. Discussing the motives of Milton's first marriage, he says, "Did he come seeking his £500, and did Mrs. Powell *heave a daughter at him?*" We have heard of a woman throwing herself at a man's head, and the image is a somewhat violent one; but what is this to Mr. Masson's improvement on it? It has been sometimes affirmed that the fitness of an image may be tested by trying whether a picture could be made of it or not. Mr. Masson has certainly offered a new and striking subject to the historical school of British art. A little further on, speaking of Mary Powell, he says, "We have no portrait of her, nor any account of her appearance; but on the usual rule of the elective affinities of opposites, Milton being fair, *we will vote her* to have been dark-haired." I need say nothing of the good taste of this sentence, but its absurdity is heightened by the fact that Mr. Masson himself had left us in doubt whether the match was one of convenience or inclination. I know not how it may be with other readers, but for myself I feel inclined to resent this hail-fellow-well-met manner with its jaunty "*we* will vote." In some cases, Mr. Masson's indecorums in respect of style may possibly be accounted for as attempts at humor by one who has an imperfect notion of its

ingredients. In such experiments, to judge by the effect, the pensive element of the compound enters in too large an excess over the hilarious. Whether I have hit upon the true explanation, or whether the cause lie not rather in a besetting velleity of the picturesque and vivid, I shall leave the reader to judge by an example or two. In the manuscript copy of Milton's sonnet in which he claims for his own house the immunity which the memory of Pindar and Euripides secured for other walls, the title had originally been, "*On his Door when the City expected an Assault.*" Milton has drawn a line through this and substituted "*When the Assault was intended to the City.*" Mr. Masson fancies "a mood of jest or semi-jest in the whole affair"; but we think rather that Milton's quiet assumption of equality with two such famous poets was as seriously characteristic as Dante's ranking himself *sesto tra cotanto senno.* Mr. Masson takes advantage of the obliterated title to imagine one of Prince Rupert's troopers entering the poet's study and finding some of his "Anti-Episcopal pamphlets that had been left lying about inadvertently. 'Oho!' the Cavalier Captain might then have said, 'Pindar and Euripides are all very well, by G—! I've been at college myself; and when I meet a gentleman and scholar, I hope I know how to treat him; but neither Pindar nor Euripides ever wrote pamphlets against the Church of England, by G—! It won't do, Mr. Milton!'" This, it may be supposed, is Mr. Masson's way of being funny and dramatic at the same time. Good taste is shocked

with this barbarous dissonance. Could not the Muse defend her son? Again, when Charles I., at Edinburgh, in the autumn and winter of 1641, fills the vacant English sees, we are told, "It was more than an insult; it was a sarcasm! It was as if the King, while giving Alexander Henderson his hand to kiss, had winked his royal eye over that reverend Presbyter's back!" Now one can conceive Charles II. winking when he took the Solemn League and Covenant, but never his father under any circumstances. He may have been, and I believe he was, a bad king, but surely we may take Marvell's word for it, that

"He nothing common did or mean,"

upon any of the "memorable scenes" of his life. The image is therefore out of all imaginative keeping, and vulgarizes the chief personage in a grand historical tragedy, who, if not a great, was at least a decorous actor. But Mr. Masson can do worse than this. Speaking of a Mrs. Katherine Chidley, who wrote in defence of the Independents against Thomas Edwards, he says, "People wondered who this she-Brownist, Katherine Chidley, was, and did not quite lose their interest in her when they found that she was an oldish woman, and a member of some hole-and-corner congregation in London. Indeed, *she put her nails into Mr. Edwards with some effect.*" Why did he not say at once, after the good old fashion, that she "set her ten commandments in his face"? In another place he speaks of "Satan standing with his *staff* around

him." Mr. Masson's style, a little Robertsonian at best, naturally grows worse when forced to condescend to every-day matters. He can no more dismount and walk than the man in armor on a Lord Mayor's day. "It [Aldersgate Street] stretches away northwards a full fourth of a mile as one continuous thoroughfare, until, crossed by Long Lane and the Barbican, it parts with the name of Aldersgate Street, and, under the new names of Goswell Street and Goswell Road, *completes its tendency towards the suburbs* and fields about Islington." What a noble work might not the Directory be if composed on this scale! The imagination even of an alderman might well be lost in that full quarter of a mile of continuous thoroughfare. Mr. Masson is very great in these passages of civic grandeur; but he is more surprising, on the whole, where he has an image to deal with. Speaking of Milton's "two-handed engine" in Lycidas, he says: "May not Milton, whatever else he meant, have meant a coming English Parliament with its two Houses? Whatever he meant, his prophecy had come true. As he sat among his books in Aldersgate Street, the two-handed engine at the door of the English Church was on the swing. Once, twice, thrice, it had swept its arcs to gather energy; now it was on the backmost poise, and the blow was to descend." One cannot help wishing that Mr. Masson would try his hand on the tenth horn of the beast in Revelation, or on the time and half a time of Daniel. There is something so consoling to a prophet in being told that,

no matter what he meant, his prophecy had come true, and that he might mean "whatever else" he pleased, so long as he *may* have meant what we choose to think he did, reasoning backward from the assumed fulfilment! But perhaps there may be detected in Mr. Masson's "swept its arcs" a little of that prophetic hedging-in vagueness to which he allows so generous a latitude. How if the "two-handed engine," after all, were a broom (or besom, to be more dignified),

> "Sweeping — vehemently sweeping,
> No pause admitted, no design avowed,"

like that wielded by the awful shape which Dion the Syracusan saw? I make the suggestion modestly, though somewhat encouraged by Mr. Masson's system of exegesis, which reminds one of the casuists' doctrine of probables, in virtue of which a man may be *probabiliter obligatus* and *probabiliter deobligatus* at the same time. But perhaps the most remarkable instance of Mr. Masson's figures of speech is where we are told that the king might have established a *bona fide* government "by giving public ascendency to the popular or Parliamentary element in his Council, and *inducing the old leaven in it either to accept the new policy, or to withdraw and become inactive.*" There is something consoling in the thought that yeast should be accessible to moral suasion. It is really too bad that bread should ever be heavy for want of such an appeal to its moral sense as should "induce it to accept the new policy." Of Mr. Masson's unhappy infection with the *vivid* style

an instance or two shall be given in justification of what has been alleged against him in that particular. He says of Loudon that "he was committed to the Tower, where for more than two months he lay, with as near a prospect as ever prisoner had of a *chop* with the executioner's axe on a scaffold on Tower Hill." I may be over-fastidious, but the word "chop" offends my ears with its coarseness, or if that be too strong, has certainly the unpleasant effect of an emphasis unduly placed. Old Auchinleck's saying of Cromwell, that "he gart kings ken they had a lith in their necks," is a good example of really vivid phrase, suggesting the axe and the block, and giving one of those dreadful hints to the imagination which are more powerful than any amount of detail, and whose skilful use is the only magic employed by the masters of truly picturesque writing. The sentence just quoted will serve also as an example of that tendency to *surplusage* which adds to the bulk of Mr. Masson's sentences at the cost of their effectiveness. If he had said simply "chop on Tower Hill" (if chop there must be), it had been quite enough, for we all know that the executioner's axe and the scaffold are implied in it. Once more, and I have done with the least agreeable part of my business. Mr. Masson, after telling over again the story of Strafford with needless length of detail, ends thus: "On Wednesday, the 12th of May, that proud *curly* head, the casket of that brain of power, rolled on the scaffold of Tower Hill." Why *curly?* Surely it is here a ludicrous impertinence. This careful

thrusting forward of outward and unmeaning particulars, in the hope of giving that reality to a picture which genius only has the art to do, is becoming a weariness in modern descriptive writing. It reminds one of the Mrs. Jarley expedient of dressing the waxen effigies of murderers in the very clothes they wore when they did the deed, or with the real halter round their necks wherewith they expiated it. It is probably very effective with the torpid sensibilities of the class who look upon wax figures as works of art. True imaginative power works with other material. Lady Macbeth striving to wash away from her hands the damned spot that is all the more there to the mind of the spectator because it is not there at all, is a type of the methods it employs and the intensity of their action.

Having discharged my duty in regard to Mr. Masson's faults of manner, which I should not have dwelt on so long had they not greatly marred a real enjoyment in the reading, and were they not the ear-mark of a school which has become unhappily numerous, I turn to a consideration of his work as a whole. I think he made a mistake in his very plan, or else was guilty of a misnomer in his title. His book is not so much a life of Milton as a collection of materials out of which a careful reader may sift the main facts of the poet's biography. His passion for minute detail is only to be equalled by his diffuseness on points mainly if not altogether irrelevant. He gives us a Survey of British Literature, occupying one hundred and twenty-eight pages of his first volume, written in the main with

good judgment, and giving the average critical opinion upon nearly every writer, great and small, who was in any sense a contemporary of Milton. I have no doubt all this would be serviceable and interesting to Mr. Masson's classes in Edinburgh University, and they may well be congratulated on having so competent a teacher; but what it has to do with Milton, unless in the case of such authors as may be shown to have influenced his style or turn of thought, one does not clearly see. Most readers of a life of Milton may be presumed to have some knowledge of the general literary history of the time, or at any rate to have the means of acquiring it, and Milton's manner (his style was his own) was very little affected by any of the English poets, with the single exception, in his earlier poems, of George Wither. Mr. Masson also has something to say about everybody, from Wentworth to the obscurest Brownist fanatic who was so much as heard of in England during Milton's lifetime. If this theory of a biographer's duty should hold, our grandchildren may expect to see "A Life of Thackeray, or who was who in England, France, and Germany during the first Half of the Nineteenth Century." These digressions of Mr. Masson's from what should have been his main topic (he always seems somehow to be "completing his tendency towards the suburbs" of his subject), give him an uneasy feeling that he must get Milton in somehow or other at intervals, if it were only to remind the reader that he has a certain connection with the book. He is eager even to

discuss a mere hypothesis, though an untenable one, if it will only increase the number of pages devoted specially to Milton, and thus lessen the apparent disproportion between the historical and the biographical matter. Milton tells us that his morning wont had been "to read good authors, or cause them to be read, till the attention be weary, or memory have his full fraught; then with useful and generous labors preserving the body's health and hardiness, to render lightsome, clear, and not lumpish obedience to the mind, to the cause of religion and our country's liberty when it shall require firm hearts in sound bodies to stand and cover their stations rather than see the ruin of our Protestantism and the enforcement of a slavish life." Mr. Masson snatches at the hint: "This is interesting," he says; "Milton, it seems, has for some time been practising drill! The City Artillery Ground was near. . . . Did Milton among others make a habit of going there of mornings? Of this more hereafter." When Mr. Masson returns to the subject he speaks of Milton's "all but positive statement . . . that in the spring of 1642, or a few months before the breaking out of the Civil War, he was in the habit of spending a part of each day *in military exercise somewhere not far from his house in Aldersgate Street.*" What he puts by way of query on page 402 has become downright certainty seventy-nine pages further on. The passage from Milton's tract makes no "statement" of the kind it pleases Mr. Masson to assume. It is merely a Miltonian way of saying that

he took regular exercise, because he believed that moral no less than physical courage demanded a sound body. And what proof does Mr. Masson bring to confirm his theory? Nothing more nor less than two or three passages in "Paradise Lost," of which I shall quote only so much as is essential to his argument: —

> "And now
> Advanced in view they stand, a horrid front
> Of dreadful length and dazzling arms, in guise
> Of warriors old with *ordered* spear and shield,
> Awaiting what command their mighty chief
> Had to impose." [1]

Mr. Masson assures us that "there are touches in this description (as, for example, the *ordering* of arms at the moment of halt, and without word of command) too exact and technical to have occurred to a mere civilian. Again, at the same review . . .

> 'He now prepared
> To speak; whereat their doubled ranks they bend
> From wing to wing, and half enclose him round
> With all his peers; *attention* held them mute.' [2]

To the present day this is the very process, or one of the processes, when a commander wishes to address his men. They wheel inward and stand at 'attention.'" But his main argument is the phrase "*ported* spears," in Book Fourth, on which he has an interesting and valuable comment. He argues the matter through a dozen pages or more, seeking to prove that Milton *must* have had some practical experience of military drill. I confess a very grave doubt whether "attention" and "ordered" in the passages cited have any other than their ordinary

[1] Book I. 562–567. [2] Ibid. 615–618

meaning, and Milton could never have looked on at the pike-exercise without learning what "ported" meant. But, be this as it may, I will venture to assert that there was not a boy in New England, forty years ago, who did not know more of the manual than is implied in Milton's use of these terms. Mr. Masson's object in proving Milton to have been a proficient in these martial exercises is to increase our wonder at his not entering the army. "If there was any man in England of whom one might surely have expected that he would be in arms among the Parliamentarians," he says, "that man was Milton." Milton may have had many an impulse to turn soldier, as all men must in such times, but I do not believe that he ever seriously intended it. Nor is it any matter of reproach that he did not. It is plain, from his works, that he believed himself very early set apart and consecrated for tasks of a very different kind, for services demanding as much self-sacrifice and of more enduring result. I have no manner of doubt that he, like Dante, believed himself divinely inspired with what he had to utter, and, if so, why not also divinely guided in what he should do or leave undone? Milton wielded in the cause he loved a weapon far more effective than a sword.

It is a necessary result of Mr. Masson's method, that a great deal of space is devoted to what might have befallen his hero and what he might have seen. This leaves a broad margin indeed for the insertion of purely hypothetical incidents. Nay, so desperately addicted is he to what he deems the

vivid style of writing, that he even goes out of his way to imagine what might have happened to anybody living at the same time with Milton. Having told us fairly enough how Shakespeare, on his last visit to London, perhaps saw Milton "a fair child of six playing at his father's door," he must needs conjure up an imaginary supper at the Mermaid. "Ah! what an evening . . . was that; and how Ben and Shakespeare *be-tongued* each other, while the others listened and wondered; and how, when the company dispersed, the sleeping street heard their departing footsteps, and the stars shone down on the old roofs." Certainly, if we may believe the old song, the stars "had nothing else to do," though their chance of shining in the middle of a London November may perhaps be reckoned very doubtful. An author should consider how largely the art of writing consists in knowing what to leave in the inkstand.

Mr. Masson's volumes contain a great deal of very valuable matter, whatever one may think of its bearing upon the life of Milton. The chapters devoted to Scottish affairs are particularly interesting to a student of the Great Rebellion, its causes and concomitants. His analyses of the two armies, of the Parliament, and the Westminster Assembly, are sensible additions to our knowledge. A too painful thoroughness, indeed, is the criticism we should make on his work as a biography. Even as a history, the reader might complain that it confuses by the multiplicity of its details, while it wearies by want of continuity. Mr. Masson lacks

the skill of an accomplished story-teller. A fact is to him a fact, never mind how unessential, and he misses the breadth of truth in his devotion to accuracy. The very order of his title-page, "The Life of Milton, narrated in Connection with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of his Time," shows, it should seem, a misconception of the true nature of his subject. Milton's chief importance, it might be fairly said his only importance, is literary. His place is fixed as the most classical of our poets.

Neither in politics, theology, nor social ethics, did Milton leave any distinguishable trace on the thought of his time or in the history of opinion. In all these lines of his activity circumstances forced upon him the position of a controversialist whose aims and results are by the necessity of the case desultory and ephemeral. Hooker before him and Hobbes after him had a far firmer grasp of fundamental principles than he. His studies in these matters were perfunctory and occasional, and his opinions were heated to the temper of the times and shaped to the instant exigencies of the forum, sometimes to his own convenience at the moment, instead of being the slow result of a deliberate judgment enlightened by intellectual and above all historical sympathy with his subject. His interest was rather in the occasion than the matter of the controversy. No aphorisms of political science are to be gleaned from his writings as from those of Burke. His intense personality could never so far dissociate itself from the question at issue as to see

it in its larger scope and more universal relations. He was essentially a *doctrinaire*, ready to sacrifice everything to what at the moment seemed the abstract truth, and with no regard to historical antecedents and consequences, provided those of scholastic logic were carefully observed. He has no respect for usage or tradition except when they count in his favor, and sees no virtue in that power of the past over the minds and conduct of men which alone insures the continuity of national growth and is the great safeguard of order and progress. The life of a nation was of less importance to him than that it should be conformed to certain principles of belief and conduct. Burke could distil political wisdom out of history because he had a profound consciousness of the soul that underlies and outlives events, and of the national character that gives them meaning and coherence. Accordingly his words are still living and operative, while Milton's pamphlets are strictly occasional and no longer interesting except as they illustrate him. In the Latin ones especially there is an odd mixture of the pedagogue and the public orator. His training, so far as it was thorough, so far, indeed, as it may be called optional, was purely poetical and artistic. A true Attic bee, he made boot on every lip where there was a trace of truly classic honey.

Milton, indeed, could hardly have been a match for some of his antagonists in theological and ecclesiastical learning. But he brought into the contest a white heat of personal conviction that

counted for much. His self-consciousness, always active, identified him with the cause he undertook. "I conceived myself to be now not as mine own person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was persuaded and whereof I had declared myself openly to be the partaker."[1] Accordingly it does not so much seem that he is the advocate of Puritanism, Freedom of Conscience, or the People of England, as that all these are *he*, and that he is speaking for himself. He was not nice in the choice of his missiles, and too often borrows a dirty lump from the dunghill of Luther; but now and then the gnarled sticks of controversy turn to golden arrows of Phœbus in his trembling hands, singing as they fly and carrying their messages of doom in music. Then, truly, in his prose as in his verse, his is the large utterance of the early gods, and there is that in him which tramples all learning under his victorious feet. From the first he looked upon himself as a man dedicated and set apart. He had that sublime persuasion of a divine mission which sometimes lifts his speech from personal to cosmopolitan significance; his genius unmistakably asserts itself from time to time, calling down fire from heaven to kindle the sacrifice of irksome private duty, and turning the hearthstone of an obscure man into an altar for the worship of mankind. Plainly enough here was a man who had received something other than Episcopal ordination. Mysterious and awful powers had laid their unimaginable hands on that fair

[1] *Apology for Smectymnuus.*

head and devoted it to a nobler service. Yet it must be confessed that, with the single exception of the "Areopagitica," Milton's tracts are wearisome reading, and going through them is like a long sea-voyage whose monotony is more than compensated for the moment by a stripe of phosphorescence heaping before you in a drift of star-sown snow, coiling away behind in winking disks of silver, as if the conscious element were giving out all the moonlight it had garnered in its loyal depths since first it gazed upon its pallid regent. Which, being interpreted, means that his prose is of value because it is Milton's, because it sometimes exhibits in an inferior degree the qualities of his verse, and not for its power of thought, of reasoning, or of statement. It is valuable, where it is best, for its inspiring quality, like the fervencies of a Hebrew prophet. The English translation of the Bible had to a very great degree Judaized, not the English mind, but the Puritan temper. Those fierce enthusiasts could more easily find elbow-room for their consciences in an ideal Israel than in a practical England. It was convenient to see Amalek or Philistia in the men who met them in the field, and one unintelligible horn or other of the Beast in their theological opponents. The spiritual provincialism of the Jewish race found something congenial in the English mind. Their national egotism quintessentialized in the prophets was especially sympathetic with the personal egotism of Milton. It was only as an inspired and irresponsible person that he could live on decent terms with

his own self-confident individuality. There is an intolerant egotism which identifies itself with omnipotence,[1] and whose sublimity is its apology; there is an intolerable egotism which subordinates the sun to the watch in its own fob. Milton's was of the former kind, and accordingly the finest passages in his prose and not the least fine in his verse are autobiographic, and this is the more striking that they are often unconsciously so. Those fallen angels in utter ruin and combustion hurled, are also cavaliers fighting against the Good Old Cause; Philistia is the Restoration, and what Samson did, that Milton would have done if he could.

The "Areopagitica" might seem an exception, but that also is a plea rather than an argument, and his interest in the question is not one of abstract principle, but of personal relation to himself. He was far more rhetorician than thinker. The sonorous amplitude of his style was better fitted to persuade the feelings than to convince the reason. The only passages from his prose that may be said to have survived are emotional, not argumentative, or they have lived in virtue of their figurative beauty, not their weight of thought. Milton's power lay in dilation. Touched by him, the simplest image, the most obvious thought,

> "Dilated stood
> Like Teneriffe or Atlas . . .
> . . . nor wanted in his grasp
> What *seemed* both spear and shield."

[1] "For him I was not sent, nor yet to free
That people, victor once, now vile and base,
Deservedly made vassal." (*P. R.*, IV. 131–133.)

But the thin stiletto of Macchiavelli is a more effective weapon than these fantastic arms of his. He had not the secret of compression that properly belongs to the political thinker, on whom, as Hazlitt said of himself, "nothing but abstract ideas makes any impression." Almost every aphoristic phrase that he has made current is borrowed from some one of the classics, like his famous

"License they mean when they cry liberty,"

from Tacitus. This is no reproach to him so far as his true function, that of poet, is concerned. It is his peculiar glory that literature was with him so much an art, an end and not a means. Of his political work he has himself told us, "I should not choose this manner of writing, wherein, knowing myself inferior to myself (led by the genial power of nature to another task), I have the use, as I may account, but of my left hand."

Mr. Masson has given an excellent analysis of these writings, selecting with great judgment the salient passages, which have an air of blank-verse thinly disguised as prose, like some of the corrupted passages of Shakespeare. We are particularly thankful to him for his extracts from the pamphlets written against Milton, especially for such as contain criticisms on his style. It is not a little interesting to see the most stately of poets reproached for his use of vulgarisms and low words. We seem to get a glimpse of the schooling of his "choiceful sense" to that nicety which could not be content till it had made his native tongue

"search all her coffers round." One cannot help thinking also that his practice in prose, especially in the long involutions of Latin periods, helped him to give that variety of pause and that majestic harmony to his blank-verse which have made it so unapproachably his own. Landor, who, like Milton, seems to have thought in Latin, has caught somewhat more than others of the dignity of his gait, but without his length of stride. Wordsworth, at his finest, has perhaps approached it, but with how long an interval! Bryant has not seldom attained to its serene equanimity, but never emulates its pomp. Keats has caught something of its large utterance, but altogether fails of its nervous severity of phrase. Cowper's muse (that moved with such graceful ease in slippers) becomes stiff when (in his translation of Homer) she buckles on her feet the cothurnus of Milton. Thomson grows tumid wherever he assays the grandiosity of his model. It is instructive to get any glimpse of the slow processes by which Milton arrived at that classicism which sets him apart from, if not above, all our other poets.

In gathering up the impressions made upon us by Mr. Masson's work as a whole, we are inclined rather to regret his copiousness for his own sake than for ours. The several parts, though disproportionate, are valuable, his research has been conscientious, and he has given us better means of understanding Milton's time than we possessed before. But how is it about Milton himself? Here was a chance, it seems to me, for a fine bit of por-

trait-painting. There is hardly a more stately figure in literary history than Milton's, no life in some of its aspects more tragical, except Dante's. In both these great poets, more than in any others, the character of the men makes part of the singular impressiveness of what they wrote and of its vitality with after times. In them the man somehow overtops the author. The works of both are full of autobiographical confidences. Like Dante, Milton was forced to become a party by himself. He stands out in marked and solitary individuality, apart from the great movement of the Civil War, apart from the supine acquiescence of the Restoration, a self-opinionated, unforgiving, and unforgetting man. Very much alive he certainly was in his day. Has Mr. Masson made him alive to us again? I fear not. At the same time, while we cannot praise either the style or the method of Mr. Masson's work, we cannot refuse to be grateful for it. It is not so much a book for the ordinary reader of biography as for the student, and will be more likely to find its place on the library-shelf than on the centre-table. It does not in any sense belong to light literature, but demands all the muscle of the trained and vigorous reader. "Truly, in respect of itself, it is a good life; but in respect that it is Milton's life it is naught."

Mr. Masson's intimacy with the facts and dates of Milton's career renders him peculiarly fit in some respects to undertake an edition of the poetical works. His edition, accordingly, has distinguished merits. The introductions to the several

poems are excellent and leave scarcely anything to be desired. The general Introduction, on the other hand, contains a great deal that might well have been omitted, and not a little that is positively erroneous. Mr. Masson's discussions of Milton's English seem often to be those of a Scotsman to whom English is in some sort a foreign tongue. It is almost wholly inconclusive, because confined to the Miltonic verse, while the basis of any altogether satisfactory study should surely be the Miltonic prose; nay, should include all the poetry and prose of his own age and of that immediately preceding it. The uses to which Mr. Masson has put the concordance to Milton's poems tempt one sometimes to class him with those whom the poet himself taxed with being "the mousehunts and ferrets of an index." For example, what profits a discussion of Milton's ἅπαξ λεγόμενα, a matter in which accident is far more influential than choice?[1] What sensible addition is made to our stock of knowledge by learning that "the word *woman* does not occur in any form in Milton's poetry before 'Paradise Lost,'" and that it is "exactly so with the word *female*"? Is it any way remarkable that such words as *Adam*, *God*, *Heaven*, *Hell*, *Paradise*, *Sin*, *Satan*, and *Serpent* should occur "very frequently" in "Paradise Lost"? Would it not rather have been surprising that they should not? Such trifles at best come under the head of what

[1] If things are to be scanned so micrologically, what weighty inferences might not be drawn from Mr. Masson's invariably printing ἅπαξ λεγομενα!

old Warner would have called cumber-minds. It is time to protest against this minute style of editing and commenting great poets. Gulliver's microscopic eye saw on the fair skins of the Brobdignagian maids of honor "a mole here and there as broad as a trencher," and we shrink from a cup of the purest Hippocrene after the critic's solar microscope has betrayed to us the grammatical, syntactical, and, above all, hypothetical monsters that sprawl in every drop of it. When a poet has been so much edited as Milton, the temptation of whosoever undertakes a new edition to see what is not to be seen becomes great in proportion as he finds how little there is that has not been seen before.

Mr. Masson is quite right in choosing to modernize the spelling of Milton, for surely the reading of our classics should be made as little difficult as possible, and he is right also in making an exception of such abnormal forms as the poet may fairly be supposed to have chosen for melodic reasons. His exhaustive discussion of the spelling of the original editions seems, however, to be the less called-for as he himself appears to admit that the compositor, not the author, was supreme in these matters, and that in nine hundred and ninety-nine cases to the thousand Milton had no system, but spelt by immediate inspiration. Yet Mr. Masson fills nearly four pages with an analysis of the vowel sounds, in which, as if to demonstrate the futility of such attempts so long as men's ears differ, he tells us that the short *a* sound is the same in *man*

and *Darby*, the short *o* sound in *God* and *does*, and what he calls the long *o* sound in *broad* and *wrath*. Speaking of the apostrophe, Mr. Masson tells us that "it is sometimes inserted, not as a possessive mark at all, but merely as a plural mark: *hero's* for *heroes*, *myrtle's* for *myrtles*, *Gorgons* and *Hydra's*, etc." Now, in books printed about the time of Milton's the apostrophe was put in almost at random, and in all the cases cited is a misprint, except in the first, where it serves to indicate that the pronunciation was not *heróës* as it had formerly been.[1] In the "possessive singular of nouns already ending in *s*," Mr. Masson tells us, "Milton's general practice is not to double the *s*; thus, *Nereus wrinkled look*, *Glaucus spell*. The necessities of metre would naturally constrain to such forms. In a possessive followed by the word *sake* or the word *side*, dislike to [of] the double sibilant makes us sometimes drop the inflection. In addition to '*for righteousness*' *sake*' such phrases as '*for thy name sake*' and '*for mercy sake*,' are allowed to pass; *bedside* is normal and *riverside* nearly so." The necessities of metre need not be taken into account with a poet like Milton, who never was fairly in his element till he got off the soundings of prose and felt the long swell of his

[1] "That you may tell heroës, when you come
To banquet with your wife."
Chapman's *Odyssey*, VIII. 336, 337.

In the facsimile of the sonnet to Fairfax I find

"Thy firm unshak'n vertue ever brings,"

which shows how much faith we need give to the apostrophe.

verse under him like a steed that knows his rider. But does the dislike of the double sibilant account for the dropping of the *s* in these cases? Is it not far rather the presence of the *s* already in the sound satisfying an ear accustomed to the English slovenliness in the pronunciation of double consonants? It was this which led to such forms as *conscience sake* and *on justice side*, and which beguiled Ben Jonson and Dryden into thinking, the one that *noise* and the other that *corps* was a plural.[1] What does Mr. Masson say to *hillside*, *Bankside*, *seaside*, *Cheapside*, *spindleside*, *spearside*, *gospelside* (of a church), *nightside*, *countryside*, *wayside*, *brookside*, and I know not how many more? Is the first half of these words a possessive? Or is it not rather a noun impressed into the service as an adjective? How do such words differ from *hilltop*, *townend*, *candlelight*, *rushlight*, *cityman*, and the like, where no double *s* can be made the scapegoat? Certainly Milton would not have avoided them for their sibilancy, he who wrote

> "And airy tongues that syllable men's names
> On sands and shores and desert wildernesses,"
>
> "So in his seed all nations shall be blest,"
>
> "And seat of Salmanasser whose success,"

[1] Mr. Masson might have cited a good example of this from Drummond, whom (as a Scotsman) he is fond of quoting for an authority in English, —

> "Sleep, Silence' child, sweet father of soft rest."

The survival of *Horse* for *horses* is another example. So by a reverse process *pult* and *shay* have been vulgarly deduced from the supposed plurals *pulse* and *chaise*.

verses that hiss like Medusa's head in wrath, and who was, I think, fonder of the sound than any other of our poets. Indeed, in compounds of the kind we always make a distinction wholly independent of the doubled *s*. Nobody would boggle at *mountainside;* no one would dream of saying *on the fatherside* or *motherside*.

Mr. Masson speaks of "the Miltonic forms *vanquisht*, *markt*, *lookt*, etc." Surely he does not mean to imply that these are peculiar to Milton? Chapman used them before Milton was born, and pressed them farther, as in *nak't* and *saf't* for *naked* and *saved*. He often prefers the contracted form in his prose also, showing that the full form of the past participle in *ed* was passing out of fashion, though available in verse.[1] Indeed, I venture to affirm that there is not a single variety of spelling or accent to be found in Milton which is without example in his predecessors or contemporaries. Even *highth*, which is thought peculiarly Miltonic, is common (in Hakluyt, for example), and still

[1] Chapman's spelling is presumably his own. At least he looked after his printed texts. I have two copies of his *Byron's Conspiracy*, both dated 1608, but one evidently printed later than the other, for it shows corrections. The more solemn ending in *ed* was probably kept alive by the reading of the Bible in churches. Though now dropped by the clergy, it is essential to the right hearing of the more metrical passages in the Old Testament, which are finer and more scientific than anything in the language, unless it be some parts of *Samson Agonistes*. I remember an old gentleman who always used the contracted form of the participle in conversation, but always gave it back its embezzled syllable in reading. Sir Thomas Browne seems to have preferred the more solemn form. At any rate he has the spelling *empuzzeled* in prose.

often heard in New England. Mr. Masson gives an odd reason for Milton's preference of it "as indicating more correctly the formation of the word by the addition of the suffix *th* to the adjective *high*." Is an adjective, then, at the base of *growth*, *earth*, *birth*, *truth*, and other words of this kind? Horne Tooke made a better guess than this. If Mr. Masson be right in supposing that a peculiar meaning is implied in the spelling *bearth* (Paradise Lost, IX. 624), which he interprets as "collective produce," though in the only other instance where it occurs it is neither more nor less than *birth*, it should seem that Milton had hit upon Horne Tooke's etymology. But it is really solemn trifling to lay any stress on the spelling of the original editions, after having admitted, as Mr. Masson has honestly done, that in all likelihood Milton had nothing to do with it. And yet he cannot refrain. On the word *voutsafe* he hangs nearly a page of dissertation on the nicety of Milton's ear. Mr. Masson thinks that Milton "must have had a reason for it," [1] and finds that reason in "his dislike to [of] the sound *ch*, or to [of] that sound combined with *s*. . . . His fine ear taught him not only to seek for musical effects and cadences at large, but also to be fastidious as to syl-

[1] He thinks the same of the variation *strook* and *struck*, though they were probably pronounced alike. In Marlowe's *Faustus* two consecutive sentences (in prose) begin with the words "Cursed be he that struck." In a note on the passage Mr. Dyce tells us that the old editions (there were three) have *stroke* and *strooke* in the first instance, and all agree on *strucke* in the second. No inference can be drawn from such casualties.

lables, and to avoid harsh or difficult conjunctions of consonants, except when there might be a musical reason for harshness or difficulty. In the management of the letter *s*, the frequency of which in English is one of the faults of the speech, he will be found, I believe, most careful and skilful. More rarely, I think, than in Shakespeare will one word ending in *s* be found followed immediately in Milton by another word beginning with the same letter; or, if he does occasionally pen such a phrase as *Moab's sons*, it will be difficult to find in him, I believe, such a harsher example as *earth's substance*, of which many writers would think nothing. [With the index to back him Mr. Masson could safely say this.] The same delicacy of ear is even more apparent in his management of the *sh* sound. He has it often, of course; but it may be noted that he rejects it in his verse when he can. He writes *Basan* for *Bashan*, *Sittim* for *Shittim*, *Silo* for *Shiloh*, *Asdod* for *Ashdod*. Still more, however, does he seem to have been wary of the compound sound *ch* as in *church*. Of his sensitiveness to this sound in excess there is a curious proof in his prose pamphlet entitled 'An Apology against a Pamphlet, called A Modest Completion, etc.,' where, having occasion to quote these lines from one of the Satires[1] of his opponent, Bishop Hall,

[1] The lines are *not* "from one of the Satires," and Milton made them worse by misquoting and bringing *love* jinglingly near to *grove*. Hall's verse (in his Satires) is always vigorous and often harmonious. He long before Milton spoke of rhyme almost in the very terms of the preface to *Paradise Lost*.

'Teach each hollow grove to sound his love,
Wearying echo with one changeless word,'

he adds, ironically, 'And so he well might, and all his auditory besides, with his *teach each!*'" Generalizations are always risky, but when extemporized from a single hint they are maliciously so. Surely it needed no great sensitiveness of ear to be set on edge by Hall's echo of *teach each.* Did Milton reject the *h* from *Bashan* and the rest because he disliked the sound of *sh*, or because he had found it already rejected by the Vulgate and by some of the earlier translators of the Bible into English? Oddly enough, Milton uses words beginning with *sh* seven hundred and fifty-four times in his poetry, not to speak of others in which the sound occurs, as, for instance, those ending in *tion.* Hall, had he lived long enough, might have retorted on Milton his own

"Manli*est*, resolu*test*, bre*ast*,
As the magnetick hard*est* iron draws,"

or his

"What moves thy inquisition?
Know'st thou not that my rising is thy fall,
And my promotion thy destruction?"

With the playful controversial wit of the day he would have hinted that too much *est-est* is as fatal to a blank-verse as to a bishop, and that danger was often incurred by those who too eagerly *shun*ned it. Nay, he might even have found an echo almost tallying with his own in

"To begirt the almighty throne
Beseeching or besieging,"

a pun worthy of Milton's worst prose. Or he might have twitted him with "a *seq*uent king who *seeks*." As for the *sh* sound, a poet could hardly have found it ungracious to his ear who wrote,

> "Gnas*h*ing for anguis*h* and despite and s*h*ame,

or again,

> "Then bursting forth
> Afres*h* with conscious terrors vex me round
> That rest or intermis*sion* none I find.
> Before mine eyes in oppos*ition* sits
> Grim Death, my son."

And if Milton disliked the *ch* sound, he gave his ears unnecessary pain by verses such as these, —

> "Straight couc*h*es close; then, rising, c*h*anges oft
> His couc*h*ant wa*tch*, as one who c*h*ose his ground";

still more by such a juxtaposition as "matchless chief." [1]

The truth is, that Milton was a harmonist rather than a melodist. There are, no doubt, some exquisite melodies (like the "Sabrina Fair") among his earlier poems, as could hardly fail to be the case

[1] Mr. Masson goes so far as to conceive it possible that Milton may have committed the vulgarism of leaving a *t* out of *slep'st*, "for ease of sound." Yet the poet could bear *boast'st* and — one stares and gasps at it — *doat'dst*. There is, by the way, a familiar passage in which the *ch* sound predominates, not without a touch of *sh* in a single couplet: —

> "Can any mortal mi*x*ture of earth's mould
> Breathe su*ch* divine enc*h*anting ravis*h*ment?"

So

> "Blotches and blains must all his flesh emboss,"

and perhaps

> "I see his tents
> Pitched about Sechem"

might be added.

in an age which produced or trained the authors of our best English glees, as ravishing in their instinctive felicity as the songs of our dramatists, but he also showed from the first that larger style which was to be his peculiar distinction. The strain heard in the "Nativity Ode," in the "Solemn Music," and in "Lycidas," is of a higher mood, as regards metrical construction, than anything that had thrilled the English ear before, giving no uncertain augury of him who was to show what sonorous metal lay silent till he touched the keys in the epical organ-pipes of our various language, that have never since felt the strain of such prevailing breath. It was in the larger movements of metre that Milton was great and original. I have spoken elsewhere of Spenser's fondness for dilation as respects thoughts and images. In Milton it extends to the language also, and often to the single words of which a period is composed. He loved phrases of towering port, in which every member dilated stands like Teneriffe or Atlas. In those poems and passages that stamp him great, the verses do not dance interweaving to soft Lydian airs, but march rather with resounding tread and clang of martial music. It is true that he is cunning in alliterations, so scattering them that they tell in his orchestra without being obvious, but it is in the more scientific region of open-voweled assonances which seem to proffer rhyme and yet withhold it (rhyme-wraiths one might call them), that he is an artist and a master. He even sometimes introduces rhyme with misleading intervals between and unobviously in his blank-verse: —

"There rest, if any rest can harbour *there;*
And, reassembling our afflicted powers,
Consult how we may henceforth most offend
Our enemy, our own loss how re*pair*,
How overcome this dire calamity,
What reinforcement we may gain from hope,
If not, what resolution from des*pair*." [1]

There is one almost perfect quatrain, —

"Before thy fellows, ambitious to win
From me some plume, that thy success may show
Destruction to the rest. This pause between
(Unanswered lest thou boast) to let thee know";

and another hardly less so, of a rhyme and an assonance, —

"If once they hear that voice, their liveliest pledge
Of hope in fears and dangers, heard so oft
In worst extremes and on the perilous edge
Of battle when it raged, in all assaults."

There can be little doubt that the rhymes in the first passage cited were intentional, and perhaps they were so in the others; but Milton's ear has tolerated not a few perfectly rhyming couplets, and others in which the assonance almost becomes rhyme, certainly a fault in blank-verse: —

"From the Asian Kings (and Parthian among these),
From India and the Golden Chersonese";

"That soon refreshed him wearied, and repaired
What hunger, if aught hunger, had impaired";

"And will alike be punished, whether thou
Reign or reign not, though to that gentle brow";

[1] I think Coleridge's nice ear would have blamed the nearness of *enemy* and *calamity* in this passage. Mr. Masson leaves out the comma after *If not*, the pause of which is needful, I think, to the sense, and certainly to keep *not* a little farther apart from *what*, ("teach each"!)

"Of pleasure, but all pleasure to destroy,
Save what is in destroying, other joy";

"Shall all be Paradise, far happier place
Than this of Eden, and far happier days";

"This my long sufferance and my day of grace
They who neglect and scorn shall never taste";

"So far remote with diminution seen,
First in his East the glorious lamp was seen." [1]

These examples (and others might be adduced) serve to show that Milton's ear was too busy about the larger interests of his measures to be always careful of the lesser. He was a strategist rather than a drill-sergeant in verse, capable, beyond any other English poet, of putting great masses through the most complicated evolutions without clash or confusion, but he was not curious that every foot should be at the same angle. In reading "Paradise Lost" one has a feeling of vastness. You float under an illimitable sky, brimmed with sunshine or hung with constellations; the abysses of space are about you; you hear the cadenced surges of an unseen ocean; thunders mutter round the horizon; and if the scene change, it is with an elemental movement like the shifting of mighty winds. His imagination seldom condenses, like Shakespeare's, in the kindling flash of a single epithet, but loves better to diffuse itself. Witness his descriptions, wherein he seems to circle like an eagle bathing in the blue streams of air, controlling with his eye broad sweeps of champaign or of sea, and rarely fulmining in the sudden swoop of intenser

[1] "First in his East," is not soothing to the ear.

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expression. He was fonder of the vague, perhaps I should rather say the indefinite, where more is meant than meets the ear, than any other of our poets. He loved epithets (like *old* and *far*) that suggest great reaches, whether of space or time. This bias shows itself already in his earlier poems, as where he hears

> "The *far off* curfew sound
> Over some *wide-watered* shore,"

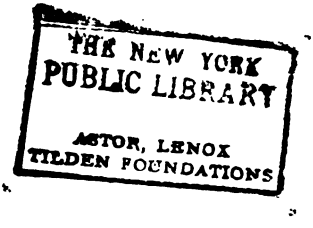
or where he fancies the shores[1] and sounding seas washing Lycidas far away; but it reaches its climax in the "Paradise Lost." He produces his effects by dilating our imaginations with an impalpable hint rather than by concentrating them upon too precise particulars. Thus in a famous comparison of his, the fleet has no definite port, but plies stemming nightly toward the pole in a wide ocean of conjecture. He generalizes always instead of specifying, — the true secret of the ideal treatment in which he is without peer, and, though everywhere grandiose, he is never turgid. Tasso begins finely with

> "Chiama gli abitator dell' ombre eterne
> Il rauco suon della tartarea tromba;
> Treman le spaziose atre caverne,
> E l' aer cieco a quel rumor rimbomba,"

but soon spoils all by condescending to definite comparisons with thunder and intestinal convulsions of the earth; in other words, he is unwary enough to give us a standard of measurement, and

[1] There seems to be something wrong in this word *shores*. Did Milton write *shoals*?

John Milton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the moment you furnish Imagination with a yard-stick she abdicates in favor of her statistical poor-relation Commonplace. Milton, with this passage in his memory, is too wise to hamper himself with any statement for which he can be brought to book, but wraps himself in a mist of looming indefiniteness;

> "He called so loud that all the hollow deep
> Of hell resounded,"

thus amplifying more nobly by abstention from his usual method of prolonged evolution. No caverns, however spacious, will serve his turn, because they have limits. He could practise this self-denial when his artistic sense found it needful, whether for variety of verse or for the greater intensity of effect to be gained by abruptness. His more elaborate passages have the multitudinous roll of thunder, dying away to gather a sullen force again from its own reverberations, but he knew that the attention is recalled and arrested by those claps that stop short without echo and leave us listening. There are no such vistas and avenues of verse as his. In reading the "Paradise Lost" one has a feeling of spaciousness such as no other poet gives. Milton's respect for himself and for his own mind and its movements rises wellnigh to veneration. He prepares the way for his thought and spreads on the ground before the sacred feet of his verse tapestries inwoven with figures of mythology and romance. There is no such unfailing dignity as his. Observe at what a reverent distance he begins when he is about to speak of himself, as at the beginning of the Third

Book and the Seventh. His sustained strength is especially felt in his beginnings. He seems always to start full-sail; the wind and tide always serve; there is never any fluttering of the canvas. In this he offers a striking contrast with Wordsworth, who has to go through with a great deal of *yo-heave-ohing* before he gets under way. And though, in the didactic parts of "Paradise Lost," the wind dies away sometimes, there is a long swell that will not let us forget it, and ever and anon some eminent verse lifts its long ridge above its tamer peers heaped with stormy memories. And the poem never becomes incoherent; we feel all through it, as in the symphonies of Beethoven, a great controlling reason in whose safe-conduct we trust implicitly.

Mr. Masson's discussions of Milton's English are, it seems to me, for the most part unsatisfactory. He occupies some ten pages, for example, with a history of the genitival form *its*, which adds nothing to our previous knowledge on the subject and which has no relation to Milton except for its bearing on the authorship of some verses attributed to him against the most overwhelming internal evidence to the contrary. Mr. Masson is altogether too resolute to find traces of what he calls oddly enough "recollectiveness of Latin constructions" in Milton, and scents them sometimes in what would seem to the uninstructed reader very idiomatic English. More than once, at least, he has fancied them by misunderstanding the passage in which they seem to occur. Thus, in "Paradise Lost," XI. 520, 521,

> "Therefore so abject is their punishment,
> Disfiguring not God's likeness but their own,"

has no analogy with *eorum deformantium*, for the context shows that it is the *punishment* which disfigures. Indeed, Mr. Masson so often finds constructions difficult, ellipses strange, and words needing annotation that are common to all poetry, nay, sometimes to all English, that his notes seem not seldom to have been written by a foreigner. On this passage in "Comus," —

> "I do not think my sister so to seek
> Or so unprincipled in virtue's book
> And the sweet peace that virtue bosoms ever
> As that the single want of light and noise
> (Not being in danger, as I trust she is not)
> Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts,"

Mr. Masson tells us, that "in very strict construction, *not being* would cling to *want* as its substantive; but the phrase passes for the Latin ablative absolute." So on the words *forestalling night*, "i. e. anticipating. *Forestall* is literally to anticipate the market by purchasing goods before they are brought to the stall." In the verse

> "Thou hast immanacled while Heaven sees good,"

he explains that "*while* here has the sense of *so long as*." But Mr. Masson's notes on the language are his weakest. He is careful to tell us, for example, "that there are instances of the use of *shine* as a substantive in Spenser, Ben Jonson, and other poets." It is but another way of spelling *sheen*, and if Mr. Masson never heard a shoeblack in the street say, "Shall I give you a shine, sir?" his

experience has been singular.[1] His notes in general are very good (though too long). Those on the astronomy of Milton are particularly valuable. I think he is sometimes a little too scornful of parallel passages,[2] for if there is one thing more striking than another in this poet, it is that his great and original imagination was almost wholly nourished by books, perhaps I should rather say set in motion by them. It is wonderful how, from the most withered and juiceless hint gathered in his reading, his grand images rise like an exhalation; how from the most battered old lamp caught in that huge drag-net with which he swept the waters

[1] But his etymological notes are worse. For example, "*recreant*, renouncing the faith, from the old French *recroire*, which again is from the mediæval Latin *recredere*, to 'believe back,' or apostatize." This is pure fancy. The word had no such meaning in either language. He derives *serenate* from *sera*, and says that *parle* means treaty, negotiation, though it is the same word as *parley*, had the same meanings, and was commonly pronounced like it, as in Marlowe's

"What, shall we parlë with this Christïan?"

It certainly never meant *treaty*, though it may have meant *negotiation*. When it did it implied the meeting face to face of the principals. On the verses

"And some flowërs and some bays
For thy hearse to strew the ways,"

he has a note to tell us that *hearse* is not to be taken "in our sense of a carriage for the dead, but in the older sense of a tomb or framework over a tomb," though the obvious meaning is "to strew the ways for thy hearse." How could one do that for a tomb or the framework over it?

[2] A passage from Dante (*Inferno*, XI. 96–105), with its reference to Aristotle, would have given him the meaning of "Nature taught art," which seems to puzzle him. A study of Dante and of his earlier commentators would also have been of great service in the astronomical notes.

of learning, he could conjure a tall genius to build his palaces. Whatever he touches swells and towers. That wonderful passage in "Comus" of the airy tongues, perhaps the most imaginative in suggestion he ever wrote, was conjured out of a dry sentence in Purchas's abstract of Marco Polo. Such examples help us to understand the poet. When I find that Sir Thomas Browne had said before Milton, that Adam "was *the wisest of all men since*," I am glad to find this link between the most profound and the most stately imagination of that age. Such parallels sometimes give a hint also of the historical development of our poetry, of its apostolical succession, so to speak. Every one has noticed Milton's fondness of sonorous proper names, which have not only an acquired imaginative value by association, and so serve to awaken our poetic sensibilities, but have likewise a merely musical significance. This he probably caught from Marlowe, traces of whom are frequent in him. There is certainly something of what afterwards came to be called Miltonic in more than one passage of "Tamburlaine," a play in which gigantic force seems struggling from the block, as in Michel Angelo's Dawn.

Mr. Masson's remarks on the versification of Milton are, in the main, judicious, but when he ventures on particulars, one cannot always agree with him. He seems to understand that our prosody is accentual merely, and yet, when he comes to what he calls *variations*, he talks of the "substitution of the Trochee, the Pyrrhic, or the Spondee,

for the regular Iambus, or of the Anapæst, the Dactyl, the Tribrach, etc., for the same." This is always misleading. The shift of the accent in what Mr. Masson calls "dissyllabic variations" is common to all pentameter verse, and, in the other case, most of the words cited as trisyllables either were not so in Milton's day,[1] or were so or not at choice of the poet, according to their place in the verse. There is not an elision of Milton's without precedent in the dramatists from whom he learned to write blank-verse. Milton was a greater metrist than any of them, except Marlowe and Shakespeare, and he employed the elision (or the slur) oftener than they to give a faint undulation or retardation to his verse, only because his epic form demanded it more for variety's sake. How Milton would have *read* them, is another question. He certainly often marked them by an apostrophe in his manuscripts. He doubtless composed according to quantity, so far as that is possible in English, and as Cowper somewhat extravagantly says, "gives almost as many proofs of it in his 'Paradise Lost' as there are lines in the poem."[2] But when Mr. Masson tells us that

> "Self-fed and self-consumed: if this fail,"

and

> "Dwells in all Heaven charity so rare,"

are "only nine syllables," and that in

[1] Almost every combination of two vowels might in those days be a diphthong or not, at will. Milton's practice of elision was confirmed and sometimes (perhaps) modified by his study of the Italians, with whose usage in this respect he closely conforms.

[2] Letter to Rev. W. Bagot, 4th January, 1791.

"Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream,"

"either the third foot must be read as an *anapæst* or the word *hugest* must be pronounced as one syllable, *hug'st*," I think Milton would have invoked the soul of Sir John Cheek. Of course Milton read it

"Created hugest that swim th' ocean-stream,"

just as he wrote (if we may trust Mr. Masson's facsimile)

"Thus sang the uncouth swain to th' oaks and rills,"

a verse in which both hiatus and elision occur precisely as in the Italian poets.[1] "Gest that swim" would be rather a knotty *anapæst*, an insupportable foot indeed! And why is even *hug'st* worse than Shakespeare's

"*Young'st* follower of thy drum"?

In the same way he says of

"For we have also our evening and our morn,"

that "the metre of this line is irregular," and of the rapidly fine

"Came flying and in mid air aloud thus cried,"

that it is "a line of unusual metre." Why more unusual than

"As being the contrary to his high will"?

What would Mr. Masson say to these three verses from Dekkar? —

[1] So Dante: —

"Ma sapienza e amore e virtute."

So Donne: —

"Simony and sodomy in churchmen's lives."

"And *knowing* so much, I muse thou art so poor";

"I fan away the dust *flying* in mine eyes";

"*Flowing* o'er with court news only of you and them."

All such participles (where no consonant divided the vowels) were normally of one syllable, permissibly of two.[1] If Mr. Masson had studied the poets who preceded Milton as he has studied *him*, he would never have said that the verse

"Not this rock only; his omnipresence fills,"

was "peculiar as having a distinct syllable of overmeasure." He retains Milton's spelling of *hunderd* without perceiving the metrical reason for it, that *d*, *t*, *p*, *b*, &c., followed by *l* or *r*, might be either of two or of three syllables. In Marlowe we find it both ways in two consecutive verses: —

"A hundred [hunderëd] and fifty thousand horse,
Two hundred thousand foot, brave men at arms."[2]

Mr. Masson is especially puzzled by verses ending in one or more unaccented syllables, and even argues in his Introduction that some of them might be reckoned Alexandrines. He cites some lines of Spenser as confirming his theory, forgetting that rhyme wholly changes the conditions of the case

[1] Mr. Masson is evidently not very familiar at first hand with the versification to which Milton's youthful ear had been trained, but seems to have learned something from Abbott's *Shakespearian Grammar* in the interval between writing his notes and his Introduction. Walker's *Shakespeare's Versification* would have been a great help to him in default of original knowledge.

[2] Milton has a verse in *Comus* where the *e* is elided from the word *sister* by its preceding a vowel: —

"Heaven keep my sister! again, again, and near!"

This would have been impossible before a consonant.

by throwing the accent (appreciably even now, but more emphatically in Spenser's day) on the last syllable.

"A spirit and judgment equal or superior,"

he calls "a remarkably anomalous line, consisting of twelve or even thirteen syllables." Surely Milton's ear would never have tolerated a dissyllabic "spirit" in such a position. The word was then more commonly of one syllable, though it might be two, and was accordingly spelt *spreet* (still surviving in *sprite*), *sprit*, and even *spirt*, as Milton himself spells it in one of Mr. Masson's facsimiles.[1] Shakespeare, in the verse

"Hath put a spirit of youth in everything,"

uses the word admirably well in a position where it *cannot* have a metrical value of more than one syllable, while it gives a dancing movement to the verse in keeping with the sense. Our old metrists were careful of elasticity, a quality which modern verse has lost in proportion as our language has stiffened into uniformity under the benumbing fingers of pedants.

This discussion of the value of syllables is not so trifling as it seems. A great deal of nonsense has been written about imperfect measures in Shakespeare, and of the admirable dramatic effect produced by filling up the gaps of missing syllables with pauses or prolongations of the voice in reading. In rapid, abrupt, and passionate dialogue this is possible, but in passages of continuously

[1] So *spirito* and *spirto* in Italian, *esperis* and *espirs* in Old French.

level speech it is barbarously absurd. I do not believe that any of our old dramatists has knowingly left us a single imperfect verse. Seeing in what a haphazard way and in how mutilated a form their plays have mostly reached us, we should attribute such *faults* (as a geologist would call them) to anything rather than to the deliberate design of the poets. Marlowe and Shakespeare, the two best metrists among them, have given us a standard by which to measure what licenses they took in versification, — the one in his translations, the other in his poems. The unmanageable verses in Milton are very few, and all of them occur in works printed after his blindness had lessened the chances of supervision and increased those of error. There are only two, indeed, which seem to me wholly indigestible as they stand. These are,

"Burnt after them to the bottomless pit,"

and

"With them from bliss to the bottomless deep."

This certainly looks like a case where a word had dropped out or had been stricken out by some proof-reader who limited the number of syllables in a pentameter verse by that of his finger-ends. Mr. Masson notices only the first of these lines, and says that to make it regular by accenting the word *bottomless* on the second syllable would be "too horrible." Certainly not, if Milton so accented it, any more than *blasphémous* and twenty more which sound oddly to us now. However that may be, Milton could not have intended to close not only a period, but a paragraph also, with an unmusical

verse, and in the only other passage where the word occurs it is accented as now on the first syllable:

> "With hideous ruin and combustion down
> To bottomless perdition, there to dwell."

As *bottom* is a word which, like *bosom* and *besom*, may be monosyllabic or dissyllabic according to circumstances, I am persuaded that the last passage quoted (and all three refer to the same event) gives us the word wanting in the two others, and that Milton wrote, or meant to write, —

> "Burnt after them down to the bottomless pit,"

which leaves in the verse precisely the kind of ripple that Milton liked best.[1]

Much of what Mr. Masson says in his Introduction of the way in which the verses of Milton should be read is judicious enough, though some of the examples he gives, of the "comicality" which would ensue from compressing every verse into an exact measure of ten syllables, are based on a surprising ignorance of the laws which guided our poets just before and during Milton's time in the structure of their verses. Thus he seems to think that a strict scansion would require us in the verses

> "So he with difficulty and labor hard,"

and

> "Carnation, purple, azure, or specked with gold,"

[1] Milton, however, would not have balked at *th' bottomless* any more than Drayton at *th' rejected* or Donne at *th' sea*. Mr. Masson does not seem to understand this elision, for he corrects *i' th' midst* to *i' the midst*, and takes pains to mention it in a note. He might better have restored the *n* in *i'*, where it is no contraction, but merely indicates the pronunciation, as *o'* for *of* and *on*.

to pronounce *diffikty* and *purp'*. Though Mr. Masson talks of "slurs and elisions," his ear would seem somewhat insensible to their exact nature or office. His *diffikty* supposes a hiatus where none is intended, and his making *purple* of one syllable wrecks the whole verse, the real slur in the latter case being on *azure or*.[1] When he asks whether Milton required "these pronunciations in his verse," no positive answer can be given, but I very much doubt whether he would have thought that some of the lines Mr. Masson cites "remain perfectly good Blank Verse even with the most leisurely natural enunciation of the spare syllable," and I am sure he would have stared if told that "the number of accents" in a pentameter verse was "variable." It may be doubted whether elisions and compressions which would be thought in bad taste or even vulgar now were more abhorrent to the ears of Milton's generation than to a cultivated Italian would be the hearing Dante read as prose. After all, what Mr. Masson says may be reduced to the infallible axiom that poetry should be read as poetry.

Mr. Masson seems to be right in his main principles, but the examples he quotes make one doubt whether he knows what a verse is. For example, he thinks it would be a "horror," if in the verse

"That invincible Samson far renowned"

we should lay the stress on the first syllable of *invincible*. It is hard to see why this should be worse than *cónventicle* or *rémonstrance* or *súcces-*

[1] Exactly analogous to that in *treasurer* when it is shortened to two syllables.

sor or *incómpatible*, (the three latter used by the correct Daniel) or why Mr. Masson should clap an accent on *surfàce* merely because it comes at the end of a verse, and deny it to *invincible*. If one read the verse just cited with those that go with it, he will find that the accent *must* come on the first syllable of *invincible*, or else the whole passage becomes chaos.[1] Should we refuse to say *obleeged* with Pope because the fashion has changed? From its apparently greater freedom in skilful hands, blank verse gives more scope to sciolistic theorizing and dogmatism than the rhyming pentameter couplet, but it is safe to say that no verse is good in the one that would not be good in the other when handled by a master like Dryden. Milton, like other great poets, wrote some bad verses, and it is wiser to confess that they are so than to conjure up some unimaginable reason why the reader should accept them as the better for their badness. Such a bad verse is

"Rocks, caves, lakes, *fens*, bogs, *dens* and shapes of death,"

which might be cited to illustrate Pope's

"And ten low words oft creep in one dull line."

Milton cannot certainly be taxed with any partiality for low words. He rather loved them tall, as the Prussian King loved men to be six feet high in their stockings, and fit to go into the gren-

[1] Milton himself has *invisible*, for we cannot suppose him guilty of a verse like

"Shoots invísible virtue even to the deep,"

while, if read rightly, it has just one of those sweeping elisions that he loved.

adiers. He loved them as much for their music as for their meaning, — perhaps more. His style, therefore, when it has to deal with commoner things, is apt to grow a little cumbrous and unwieldy. A Persian poet says that when the owl would boast, he boasts of catching mice at the edge of a hole. Shakespeare would have understood this. Milton would have made him talk like an eagle. His influence is not to be left out of account as partially contributing to that decline toward poetic diction which was already beginning ere he died. If it would not be fair to say that he is the most artistic, he may be called in the highest sense the most scientific of our poets. If to Spenser younger poets have gone to be sung-to, they have sat at the feet of Milton to be taught. Our language has no finer poem than "Samson Agonistes," if any so fine in the quality of austere dignity or in the skill with which the poet's personal experience is generalized into a classic tragedy.

Gentle as Milton's earlier portraits would seem to show him, he had in him by nature, or bred into him by fate, something of the haughty and defiant self-assertion of Dante and Michael Angelo. In no other English author is the man so large a part of his works. Milton's haughty conception of himself enters into all he says and does. Always the necessity of this one man became that of the whole human race for the moment. There were no walls so sacred but must go to the ground when *he* wanted elbow-room; and he wanted a great

deal. Did Mary Powell, the cavalier's daughter, find the abode of a roundhead schoolmaster *incompatible* and leave it, forthwith the cry of the universe was for an easier dissolution of the marriage covenant. If *he* is blind, it is with excess of light, it is a divine partiality, an over-shadowing with angels' wings. Phineus and Teiresias are admitted among the prophets because they, too, had lost their sight, and the blindness of Homer is of more account than his Iliad. After writing in rhyme till he was past fifty, he finds it unsuitable for his epic, and it at once becomes "the invention of a barbarous age to set off wretched matter and lame metre." If the structure of *his* mind be undramatic, why, then, the English drama is naught, learned Jonson, sweetest Shakespeare, and the rest notwithstanding, and he will compose a tragedy on a Greek model with the blinded Samson for its hero, and he will compose it partly in rhyme. Plainly he belongs to the intenser kind of men whose yesterdays are in no way responsible for their to-morrows. And this makes him perennially interesting even to those who hate his politics, despise his Socinianism, and find his greatest poem a bore. A new edition of his poems is always welcome, for, as he is really great, he presents a fresh side to each new student, and Mr. Masson, in his three handsome volumes, has given us, with much that is superfluous and even erroneous, much more that is a solid and permanent acquisition to our knowledge.

It results from the almost scornful withdrawal

of Milton into the fortress of his absolute personality that no great poet is so uniformly self-conscious as he. We should say of Shakespeare that he had the power of transforming himself into everything; of Milton, that he had that of transforming everything into himself. Dante is individual rather than self-conscious, and he, the cast-iron man, grows pliable as a field of grain at the breath of Beatrice, and flows away in waves of sunshine. But Milton never let himself go for a moment. As other poets are possessed by their theme, so is he *self*-possessed, his great theme being John Milton, and his great duty that of interpreter between him and the world. I say it with all respect, for he was well worthy translation, and it is out of Hebrew that the version is made. Pope says he makes God the Father reason "like a school-divine." The criticism is witty, but inaccurate. He makes Deity a mouthpiece for his present theology, and had the poem been written a few years later, the Almighty would have become more heterodox. Since Dante, no one had stood on these visiting terms with heaven.

Now it is precisely this audacity of self-reliance, I suspect, which goes far toward making the sublime, and which, falling by a hair's-breadth short thereof, makes the ridiculous. Puritanism showed both the strength and weakness of its prophetic nurture; enough of the latter to be scoffed out of England by the very men it had conquered in the field, enough of the former to intrench itself in three or four immortal memories. It has left an

abiding mark in politics and religion, but its great monuments are the prose of Bunyan and the verse of Milton. It is a high inspiration to be the neighbor of great events; to have been a partaker in them and to have seen noble purposes by their own self-confidence become the very means of ignoble ends, if it do not wholly depress, may kindle a passion of regret deepening the song which dares not tell the reason of its sorrow. The grand loneliness of Milton in his latter years, while it makes him the most impressive figure in our literary history, is reflected also in his maturer poems by a sublime independence of human sympathy like that with which mountains fascinate and rebuff us. But it is idle to talk of the loneliness of one the habitual companions of whose mind were the Past and Future. I always seem to see him leaning in his blindness a hand on the shoulder of each, sure that the one will guard the song which the other had inspired.

DANTE[1]

1872

On the banks of a little river so shrunken by the suns of summer that it seems fast passing into a tradition, but so swollen by the autumnal rains with Italian suddenness of passion that the massy bridge shudders under the impatient heap of waters behind it, stands a city which, in its period of bloom not so large as Boston, may well rank next to Athens in the history which teaches *come l' uom s' eterna.*

Originally only a convenient spot in the valley where the fairs of the neighboring Etruscan city of Fiesole were held, it gradually grew from a huddle of booths to a town, and then to a city, which absorbed its ancestral neighbor and became a cradle for the arts, the letters, the science, and the commerce[2] of modern Europe. For her Cimabue

[1] *The Shadow of Dante*, being an Essay towards studying Himself, his World, and his Pilgrimage. By Maria Francesca Rossetti.

"Se Dio te lasci, lettor prender frutto
Di tua lezione."

Boston: Roberts Brothers. 1872. 8vo, pp. 296.

[2] The Florentines should seem to have invented or re-invented banks, book-keeping by double-entry, and bills of exchange. The last, by endowing Value with the gift of fern-seed and enabling it to walk invisible, turned the flank of the baronial tariff-system and

wrought, who infused Byzantine formalism with a suggestion of nature and feeling; for her the Pisani, who divined at least, if they could not conjure with it, the secret of Greek supremacy in sculpture; for her the marvellous boy Ghiberti proved that unity of composition and grace of figure and drapery were never beyond the reach of genius;[1] for her Brunelleschi curved the dome which Michael Angelo hung in air on St. Peter's; for her Giotto reared the bell-tower graceful as an Horatian ode in marble; and the great triumvirate of Italian poetry, good sense, and culture called her mother. There is no modern city about which cluster so many elevating associations, none in which the past is so contemporary with us in unchanged buildings and undisturbed monuments. The house of Dante is still shown; children still receive baptism at the font (*il mio bel San Giovanni*) where he was christened before the acorn dropped that was to grow into a keel for Columbus; and an inscribed stone marks the spot where he used to sit and watch

made the roads safe for the great liberalizer, Commerce. This made Money omnipresent, and prepared the way for its present omnipotence. Fortunately it cannot usurp the third attribute of Deity, — omniscience. But whatever the consequences, this Florentine invention was at first nothing but admirable, securing to brain its legitimate influence over brawn. The latter has begun its revolt, but whether it will succeed better in its attempt to restore mediæval methods than the barons in maintaining them remains to be seen.

[1] Ghiberti's designs have been criticised by a too systematic æstheticism, as confounding the limits of sculpture and painting. But is not the *rilievo* precisely the bridge by which the one art passes over into the territory of the other?

the slow blocks swing up to complete the master-thought of Arnolfo. In the convent of St. Mark hard by lived and labored Beato Angelico, the saint of Christian art, and Fra Bartolommeo, who taught Raphael dignity. From the same walls Savonarola went forth to his triumphs, short-lived almost as the crackle of his martyrdom. The plain little chamber of Michael Angelo seems still to expect his return; his last sketches lie upon the table, his staff leans in the corner, and his slippers wait before the empty chair. On one of the vine-clad hills, just without the city walls, one's feet may press the same stairs that Milton climbed to visit Galileo. To an American there is something supremely impressive in this cumulative influence of a past full of inspiration and rebuke, something saddening in this repeated proof that moral supremacy is the only one that leaves monuments and not ruins behind it. Time, who with us obliterates the labor and often the names of yesterday, seems here to have spared almost the prints of the *care piante* that shunned the sordid paths of worldly honor.

Around the courtyard of the great Museum of Florence stand statues of her illustrious dead, her poets, painters, sculptors, architects, inventors, and statesmen; and as the traveller feels the ennobling lift of such society, and reads the names or recognizes the features familiar to him as his own threshold, he is startled to find Fame as commonplace here as Notoriety everywhere else, and that this fifth-rate city should have the privilege thus to

commemorate so many famous men her sons, whose claim to preëminence the whole world would concede. Among them is one figure before which every scholar, every man who has been touched by the tragedy of life, lingers with reverential pity. The haggard cheeks, the lips clamped together in unfaltering resolve, the scars of lifelong battle, and the brow whose stern outline seems the trophy of final victory, — this, at least, is a face that needs no name beneath it. This is he who among literary fames finds only two that for growth and immutability can parallel his own. The suffrages of highest authority would now place him second in that company where he with proud humility took the sixth place.[1]

Dante (Durante, by contraction Dante) degli Alighieri was born at Florence in 1265, probably during the month of May.[2] This is the date given by Boccaccio, who is generally followed, though he makes a blunder in saying, *sedendo Urbano quarto nella cattedra di San Pietro*, for Urban died in October, 1264. Some, misled by an error in a few of the early manuscript copies of the *Divina Commedia*, would have him born five years earlier, in 1260. According to Arrivabene,[3] Sansovino was

[1] *Inferno*, IV. 102.

[2] The *Nouvelle Biographie Générale* gives May 8 as his birthday. This is a mere assumption, for Boccaccio only says generally May. The indication which Dante himself gives that he was born when the sun was in Gemini would give a range from about the middle of May to about the middle of June, so that the 8th is certainly too early.

[3] *Secolo di Dante*, Udine edition of 1828, vol. iii. Part I. p. 578.

the first to confirm Boccaccio's statement by the authority of the poet himself, basing his argument on the first verse of the *Inferno*, —

"Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita";

the average age of man having been declared by the Psalmist to be seventy years, and the period of the poet's supposed vision being unequivocally fixed at 1300.[1] Leonardo Aretino and Manetti add their testimony to that of Boccaccio, and 1265 is now universally assumed as the true date. Voltaire,[2] nevertheless, places the poet's birth in 1260, and jauntily forgives Bayle (who, he says, *écrivait à Rotterdam* currente calamo *pour son libraire*) for having been right, declaring that he esteems him neither more nor less for having made a mistake of five years. Oddly enough, Voltaire adopts this alleged blunder of five years on the next page, in saying that Dante died at the age of fifty-six, though he still more oddly omits the undisputed date of his death (1321), which would have shown Bayle to be right. The poet's descent is said to have been derived from a younger son of the great Roman family of the Frangipani, classed by the popular rhyme with the Orsini and Colonna: —

"Colonna, Orsini, e Frangipani,
Prendono oggi e pagano domani."

That his ancestors had been long established in Florence is an inference from some expressions of

[1] Arrivabene, however, is wrong. Boccaccio makes precisely the same reckoning in the first note of his Commentary (Bocc. *Comento*, etc., Firenze, 1844, vol. i. pp. 32, 33).

[2] *Dict. Phil.*, art. "Dante."

the poet, and from their dwelling having been situated in the more ancient part of the city. The most important fact of the poet's genealogy is, that he was of mixed race, the Alighieri being of Teutonic origin. Dante was born, as he himself tells us,[1] when the sun was in the constellation Gemini, and it has been absurdly inferred, from a passage in the *Inferno*,[2] that his horoscope was drawn and a great destiny predicted for him by his teacher, Brunetto Latini. The *Ottimo Comento* tells us that the Twins are the house of Mercury, who induces in men the faculty of writing, science, and of acquiring knowledge. This is worth mentioning as characteristic of the age and of Dante himself, with whom the influence of the stars took the place of the old notion of destiny.[3] It is supposed, from a passage in Boccaccio's life of Dante, that Alighiero the father was still living when the poet was nine years old. If so, he must have died soon after, for Leonardo Aretino, who wrote with original documents before him, tells us that Dante lost his father while yet a child. This circumstance may have been not without influence in muscularizing his nature to that character of self-reliance which shows itself so constantly and sharply during his after-life. His tutor was Brunetto Latini, a very superior man (for that age), says Aretino parenthetically. Like Alexander Gill, he is now remembered only as the schoolmaster of a great poet, and that he did his duty well may be inferred from Dante's speaking of him gratefully as one who by

[1] *Paradiso*, XXII. [2] Canto XV. [3] *Purgatorio*, XVI.

times "taught him how man eternizes himself." This, and what Villani says of his refining the Tuscan idiom (for so we understand his *farli scorti in bene parlare*[1]), are to be noted as of probable influence on the career of his pupil. Of the order of Dante's studies nothing can be certainly affirmed. His biographers send him to Bologna, Padua, Paris, Naples, and even Oxford. All are doubtful, Paris and Oxford most of all, and the dates utterly undeterminable. Yet all are possible, nay, perhaps probable. Bologna and Padua we should be inclined to place before his exile; Paris and Oxford, if at all, after it. If no argument in favor of Paris is to be drawn from his *Pape Satan*[2] and the corresponding *paix, paix, Sathan*, in the autobiography of Cellini, nor from the very definite allusion to Doctor Siger,[3] we may yet infer from some passages in the *Commedia* that his wanderings had extended even farther;[4] for it would not be hard to show that his comparisons and illustrations from outward things are almost invariably drawn from actual eyesight. As to the nature of his studies, there can be no doubt that he went through the *trivium* (grammar, dialectic, rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy) of the then ordinary university course.

[1] Though he himself preferred French, and wrote his *Trésor* in that language for two reasons, "*l' una perchè noi siamo in Francia, e l' altra perchè la parlatura francesca è più dilettevole e più comune che tutti li altri linguaggi.*" (*Proemio, sul fine.*)

[2] *Inferno*, Canto VII. [3] *Paradiso*, Canto X.

[4] See especially *Inferno*, IX. 112 et seq.; XII. 120; XV. 4 et seq.; XXXII. 25–30.

To these he afterward added painting (or at least drawing, — *designavo un angelo sopra certe tavolette* [1]), theology, and medicine. He is said to have been the pupil of Cimabue, and was certainly the friend of Giotto, the designs for some of whose frescos at Assisi and elsewhere have been wrongly attributed to him, though we may safely believe in his helpful comment and suggestion. To prove his love of music, the episode of Casella were enough, even without Boccaccio's testimony. The range of Dante's study and acquirement would be encyclopedic in any age, but at that time it was literally possible to master the *omne scibile*, and he seems to have accomplished it. How lofty his theory of science was, is plain from this passage in the *Convito:* "He is not to be called a true lover of wisdom (*filosofo*) who loves it for the sake of gain, as do lawyers, physicians, and almost all churchmen (*li religiosi*), who study, not in order to know, but to acquire riches or advancement, and who would not persevere in study should you give them what they desire to gain by it. . . . And it may be said that (as true friendship between men consists in each wholly loving the other) the true philosopher loves every part of wisdom, and wisdom every part of the philosopher, inasmuch as she draws all to herself, and allows no one of his thoughts to wander to other things." [2] The *Convito* gives us a glance into Dante's library. We find Aristotle (whom he calls the philosopher, the master) cited

[1] *Vit. Nuov.*, p. 61, ed. Pesaro, 1829.

[2] Tratt. III. cap. xi.

seventy-six times; Cicero, eighteen; Albertus Magnus, seven; Boëthius, six; Plato (at second-hand), four; Aquinas, Avicenna, Ptolemy, the Digest, Lucan, and Ovid, three each; Virgil, Juvenal, Statius, Seneca, and Horace, twice each; and Algazzali, Alfrogan, Augustine, Livy, Orosius, and Homer (at second-hand), once. Of Greek he seems to have understood little; of Hebrew and Arabic, perhaps more. But it was not only in the closet and from books that Dante received his education. He acquired, perhaps, the better part of it in the streets of Florence, and later, in those homeless wanderings which led him (as he says) wherever the Italian tongue was spoken. His were the only open eyes of that century, and, as nothing escaped them, so there is nothing that was not photographed upon his sensitive brain, to be afterward fixed forever in the *Commedia*. What Florence was during his youth and manhood, with its Guelphs and Ghibellines, its nobles and trades, its Bianchi and Neri, its kaleidoscopic revolutions, "all parties loving liberty and doing their best to destroy her," as Voltaire says, it would be beyond our province to tell even if we could. Foreshortened as events are when we look back on them across so many ages, only the upheavals of party conflict catching the eye, while the spaces of peace between sink out of the view of history, a whole century seems like a mere wild chaos. Yet during a couple of such centuries the cathedrals of Florence, Pisa, and Siena got built; Cimabue, Giotto, Arnolfo, the Pisani, Brunelleschi, and Ghiberti gave the im-

pulse to modern art, or brought it in some of its branches to its culminating point; modern literature took its rise; commerce became a science, and the middle class came into being. It was a time of fierce passions and sudden tragedies, of picturesque transitions and contrasts. It found Dante, shaped him by every experience that life is capable of, — rank, ease, love, study, affairs, statecraft, hope, exile, hunger, dependence, despair, — until he became endowed with a sense of the nothingness of this world's goods possible only to the rich, and a knowledge of man possible only to the poor. The few well-ascertained facts of Dante's life may be briefly stated. In 1274 occurred what we may call his spiritual birth, the awakening in him of the imaginative faculty, and of that profounder and more intense consciousness which springs from the recognition of beauty through the antithesis of sex. It was in that year that he first saw Beatrice Portinari. In 1289 he was present at the battle of Campaldino, fighting on the side of the Guelphs who there utterly routed the Ghibellines, and where, he says characteristically enough, "I was present, not a boy in arms, and where I felt much fear, but in the end the greatest pleasure, from the various changes of the fight."[1] In the same year he assisted at the siege and capture of Caprona.[2] In 1290 died Beatrice, married to Simone dei Bardi, precisely when is uncertain, but before 1287, as appears by a mention of her in her father's will,

[1] Letter of Dante, now lost, cited by Aretino.

[2] *Inferno*, XXI. 94.

bearing date January 15 of that year. Dante's own marriage is assigned to various years, ranging from 1291 to 1294; but the earlier date seems the more probable, as he was the father of seven children (the youngest, a daughter, named Beatrice) in 1301. His wife was Gemma dei Donati, and through her Dante, whose family, though noble, was of the lesser nobility, became nearly connected with Corso Donati, the head of a powerful clan of the *grandi*, or greater nobles. In 1293 occurred what is called the revolution of Gian Della Bella, in which the priors of the trades took the power into their own hands, and made nobility a disqualification for office. A noble was defined to be any one who counted a knight among his ancestors, and thus the descendant of Cacciaguida was excluded.

Della Bella was exiled in 1295, but the nobles did not regain their power. On the contrary, the citizens, having all their own way, proceeded to quarrel among themselves, and subdivided into the *popolani grossi* and *popolani minuti*, or greater and lesser trades, — a distinction of gentility somewhat like that between wholesale and retail tradesmen. The *grandi* continuing turbulent, many of the lesser nobility, among them Dante, drew over to the side of the citizens, and between 1297 and 1300 there is found inscribed in the book of the physicians and apothecaries, *Dante d' Aldighiero, degli Aldighieri, poeta Fiorentino.*[1] Professor de Vericour thinks it necessary to apologize for this lapse on the part of the poet, and gravely bids us

[1] Balbo, *Vita di Dante*, Firenze, 1853, p. 117.

take courage, nor think that Dante was ever an apothecary.[1] In 1300 we find him elected one of the priors of the city. In order to a perfect misunderstanding of everything connected with the Florentine politics of this period, one has only to study the various histories. The result is a spectrum on the mind's eye, which looks definite and brilliant, but really hinders all accurate vision, as if from too steady inspection of a Catharine-wheel in full whirl. A few words, however, are necessary, if only to make the confusion palpable. The rival German families of Welfs and Weiblingens had given their names, softened into Guelfi and Ghibellini, — from which Gabriel Harvey[2] ingeniously, but mistakenly, derives elves and goblins, — to two parties in Northern Italy, representing respectively the adherents of the pope and of the emperor, but serving very well as rallying-points in all manner of intercalary and subsidiary quarrels. The nobles, especially the greater ones, — perhaps from instinct, perhaps in part from hereditary tradition, as being more or less Teutonic by descent, — were commonly Ghibellines, or Imperialists; the bourgeoisie were very commonly Guelphs, or supporters of the pope, partly from natural antipathy to the nobles, and partly, perhaps, because they believed themselves to be espousing the more purely Italian side. Sometimes, however, the party relation of nobles and burghers to each other was reversed, but the names of Guelph and Ghibelline always substan-

[1] *Life and Times of Dante*, London, 1858, p. 80.

[2] Notes to Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*.

tially represented the same things. The family of Dante had been Guelphic, and we have seen him already as a young man serving two campaigns against the other party. But no immediate question as between pope and emperor seems then to have been pending; and while there is no evidence that he was ever a mere partisan, the reverse would be the inference from his habits and character. Just before his assumption of the priorate, however, a new complication had arisen. A family feud, beginning in the neighboring city of Pistoja, between the Cancellieri Neri and Cancellieri Bianchi,[1] had extended to Florence, where the Guelphs took the part of the Neri and the Ghibellines of the Bianchi.[2] The city was instantly in a ferment of street brawls, as actors in one of which some of the Medici are incidentally named, — the first appearance of that family in history. Both parties appealed at different times to the pope, who sent two ambassadors, first a bishop and then a cardinal. Both pacificators soon flung out again in a rage, after adding the new element of excommunication to the causes of confusion. It was in the midst of these things that Dante became one of the six priors (June, 1300), — an office which the Florentines had made bimestrial in its tenure, in order apparently to secure at least six constitutional chances of revolution in the year. He advised

[1] See the story at length in Balbo, *Vita di Dante*, cap. x.

[2] Thus Foscolo. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that at first the blacks were the extreme Guelphs, and the whites those moderate Guelphs inclined to make terms with the Ghibellines. The matter is obscure, and Balbo contradicts himself about it.

that the leaders of both parties should be banished to the frontiers, which was forthwith done ; the ostracism including his relative Corso Donati among the Neri, and his most intimate friend the poet Guido Cavalcanti among the Bianchi. They were all permitted to return before long (though after Dante's term of office was over), and came accordingly, bringing at least the Scriptural allowance of "seven other" motives of mischief with them. Affairs getting worse (1301), the Neri, with the connivance of the pope (Boniface VIII.), entered into an arrangement with Charles of Valois, who was preparing an expedition to Italy. Dante was meanwhile sent on an embassy to Rome (September, 1301, according to Arrivabene,[1] but probably earlier) by the Bianchi, who still retained all the offices at Florence. It is the tradition that he said in setting forth: "If I go, who remains? and if I stay, who goes?" Whether true or not, the story implies what was certainly true, that the counsel and influence of Dante were of great weight with the more moderate of both parties. On October 31, 1301, Charles took possession of Florence in the interest of the Neri. Dante being still at Rome (January 27, 1302), sentence of exile was pronounced against him and others, with a heavy fine to be paid within two months; if not paid, the entire confiscation of goods, and, whether paid or no, exile; the charge against him being pecuniary malversation in office. The fine not paid (as it

[1] *Secolo di Dante*, p. 654. He would seem to have been in Rome during the Jubilee of 1300. See *Inferno*, XVIII. 28–33.

could not be without admitting the justice of the charges, which Dante scorned even to deny), in less than two months (March 10, 1302) a second sentence was registered, by which he with others was condemned to be burned alive if taken within the boundaries of the republic.[1] From this time the life of Dante becomes semi-mythical, and for nearly every date we are reduced to the "as they say" of Herodotus. He became now necessarily identified with his fellow-exiles (fragments of all parties united by common wrongs in a practical, if not theoretic, Ghibellinism), and shared in their attempts to reinstate themselves by force of arms. He was one of their council of twelve, but withdrew from it on account of the unwisdom of their measures. Whether he was present at their futile assault on Florence (July 22, 1304) is doubtful, but probably he was not. From the *Ottimo Comento*, written at least in part[2] by a contemporary as early as 1333, we learn that Dante soon separated himself from his companions in misfortune with mutual discontents and recriminations.[3] During the nineteen years of Dante's exile, it would be hard to say where he was not. In certain districts of Northern Italy there is scarce a village that has

[1] That Dante was not of the *grandi*, or great nobles (what we call grandees), as some of his biographers have tried to make out, is plain from this sentence, where his name appears low on the list and with no ornamental prefix, after half a dozen *domini*. Bayle, however, is equally wrong in supposing his family to have been obscure.

[2] See Witte, "Quando e da chi sia composto l' Ottimo Comento," etc. (Leipsic, 1847).

[3] *Ott. Com. Parad.* XVII.

not its tradition of him, its *sedia*, *rocca*, *spelonca*, or *torre di Dante;* and what between the patriotic complaisance of some biographers overwilling to gratify as many provincial vanities as possible, and the pettishness of others anxious only to snub them, the confusion becomes hopeless.[1] After his banishment we find some definite trace of him first at Arezzo with Uguccione della Faggiuola; then at Siena; then at Verona with the Scaligeri. He himself says: "Through almost all parts where this language [Italian] is spoken, a wanderer, well-nigh a beggar, I have gone, showing against my will the wound of fortune. Truly I have been a vessel without sail or rudder, driven to diverse ports, estuaries, and shores by that hot blast, the breath of grievous poverty; and I have shown myself to the eyes of many who perhaps, through some fame of me, had imagined me in quite other guise, in whose view not only was my person debased, but every work of mine, whether done or yet to do, became of less account."[2] By the election of the Emperor Henry VII. (of Luxemburg, November,

[1] The loose way in which many Italian scholars write history is as amazing as it is perplexing. For example: Count Balbo's *Life of Dante* was published originally at Turin, in 1839. In a note (lib. i. cap. x.) he expresses a doubt whether the date of Dante's banishment should not be 1303, and inclines to think it should be. Meanwhile, it seems never to have occurred to him to employ some one to look at the original decree, still existing in the archives. Stranger still, Le Monnier, reprinting the work at Florence in 1853, within a stone's-throw of the document itself, and with full permission from Balbo to make corrections, leaves the matter just where it was.

[2] *Convito*, Tratt. I. cap. iii.

1308), and the news of his proposed expedition into Italy, the hopes of Dante were raised to the highest pitch. Henry entered Italy, October, 1310, and received the iron crown of Lombardy at Milan, on the day of Epiphany, 1311. His movements being slow, and his policy undecided, Dante addressed him that famous letter, urging him to crush first the "Hydra and Myrrha" Florence, as the root of all the evils of Italy (April 16, 1311). To this year we must probably assign the new decree by which the seigniory of Florence recalled a portion of the exiles, excepting Dante, however, among others, by name.[1] The undertaking of Henry, after an ill-directed dawdling of two years, at last ended in his death at Buonconvento (August 24, 1313; Carlyle says wrongly September); poisoned, it was said, in the sacramental bread, by a Dominican friar, bribed thereto by Florence.[2] The story is doubtful, the more as Dante nowhere alludes to it, as he certainly would have done had he heard of it. According to Balbo, Dante spent the time from August, 1313, to November, 1314, in Pisa and Lucca, and then took refuge at Verona, with Can Grande della Scala (whom Voltaire calls, drolly enough, *le grand-can de Vérone*, as if he had been a Tartar), where he remained till 1318. Foscolo with equal positiveness sends him,

[1] Macchiavelli is the authority for this, and is carelessly cited in the preface to the Udine edition of the *Codex Bartolinianus* as placing it in 1312. Macchiavelli does no such thing, but expressly implies an earlier date, perhaps 1310. (See Macch. *Op.* ed. Baretti, London, 1772, vol. i. p. 60.)

[2] See Carlyle's *Frederic*, vol. i. p. 147.

immediately after the death of Henry, to Guido da Polenta[1] at Ravenna, and makes him join Can Grande only after the latter became captain of the Ghibelline league in December, 1318. In 1316 the government of Florence set forth a new decree allowing the exiles to return on conditions of fine and penance. Dante rejected the offer (by accepting which his guilt would have been admitted), in a letter still hot, after these five centuries, with indignant scorn. "Is this then the glorious return of Dante Alighieri to his country after nearly three lustres of suffering and exile? Did an innocence, patent to all, merit this? — this, the perpetual sweat and toil of study? Far from a man, the housemate of philosophy, be so rash and earthen-hearted a humility as to allow himself to be offered up bound like a school-boy or a criminal! Far from a man, the preacher of justice, to pay those who have done him wrong as for a favor! This is not the way of returning to my country; but if another can be found that shall not derogate from the fame and honor of Dante, that I will enter on with no lagging steps. For if by none such Florence may be entered, by me then never! Can I not everywhere behold the mirrors of the sun and stars? speculate on sweetest truths under any sky without first giving myself up inglorious, nay, ig-

[1] A mistake, for Guido did not become lord of Ravenna till several years later. But Boccaccio also assigns 1313 as the date of Dante's withdrawal to that city, and his first protector may have been one of the other Polentani to whom Guido (surnamed Novello, or the Younger; his grandfather having borne the same name) succeeded.

nominious, to the populace and city of Florence? Nor shall I want for bread." Dionisi puts the date of this letter in 1315.[1] He is certainly wrong, for the decree is dated December 11, 1316. Foscolo places it in 1316, Troya early in 1317, and both may be right, as the year began March 25. Whatever the date of Dante's visit to Voltaire's great Khan[2] of Verona, or the length of his stay with him, may have been, it is certain that he was in Ravenna in 1320, and that, on his return thither from an embassy to Venice (concerning which a curious letter, forged probably by Doni, is extant), he died on September 14, 1321 (13th, according to others). He was buried at Ravenna under a monument built by his friend, Guido Novello.[3]

[1] Under this date (1315) a fourth *condemnatio* against Dante is mentioned *facta in anno* 1315 *de mense Octobris per D. Rainerium, D. Zacharii de Urbeveteri, olim et tunc vicarium regium civitatis Florentiæ*, etc. It is found recited in the decree under which in 1342 Jacopo di Dante redeemed a portion of his father's property, to wit: *Una possessione cum vinea et cum domibus super ea, combustis et non combustis, posita in populo S. Miniatis de Pagnola.* In the *domibus combustis* we see the blackened traces of Dante's kinsman by marriage, Corso Donati, who plundered and burnt the houses of the exiled Bianchi, during the occupation of the city by Charles of Valois. (See *De Romanis*, notes on Tiraboschi's Life of Dante, in the Florence ed. of 1830, vol. v. p. 119.)

[2] Voltaire's blunder has been made part of a serious theory by Mons. E. Aroux, who gravely assures us that, during the Middle Ages, Tartar was only a cryptonym by which heretics knew each other, and adds: *Il n'y a donc pas trop à s'étonner des noms bizarres de Mastino et de Cane donnés à ces Della Scala.* (*Dante, hérétique, révolutionnaire, et socialiste*, Paris, 1854, pp. 118–120.)

[3] If no monument at all was built by Guido, as is asserted by Balbo (*Vita*, i. lib. ii. cap. xvii.), whom De Vericour copies without question, we are at a loss to account for the preservation

Dante is said to have dictated the following inscription for it on his death-bed: —

JVRA MONARCHIÆ SVPEROS PHLEGETHONTA LACVSQVE
LVSTRANDO CECINI VOLVERVNT FATA QVOVSQVE
SED QVIA PARS CESSIT MELIORIBVS HOSPITA CASTRIS
AVCTOREMQVE SVVM PETIIT FELICIOR ASTRIS
HIC CLAVDOR DANTES PATRIIS EXTORRIS AB ORIS
QVEM GENVIT PARVI FLORENTIA MATER AMORIS.

Of which this rude paraphrase may serve as a translation: —

The rights of Monarchy, the Heavens, the Stream of Fire, the Pit,
In vision seen, I sang as far as to the Fates seemed fit;
But since my soul, an alien here, hath flown to nobler wars,
And, happier now, hath gone to seek its Maker 'mid the stars,
Here am I Dante shut, exiled from the ancestral shore,
Whom Florence, the of all least-loving mother, bore.[1]

of the original epitaph replaced by Bernardo Bembo when he built the new tomb, in 1483. Bembo's own inscription implies an already existing monument, and, if in disparaging terms, yet epitaphial Latin verses are not to be taken too literally, considering the exigencies of that branch of literary ingenuity. The doggerel Latin has been thought by some unworthy of Dante, as Shakespeare's doggerel English epitaph has been thought unworthy of him. In both cases the rudeness of the verses seems to us a proof of authenticity. An enlightened posterity with unlimited superlatives at command, and in an age when stone-cutting was cheap, would have aimed at something more befitting the occasion. It is certain, at least in Dante's case, that Bembo would never have inserted in the very first words an allusion to the *De Monarchia*, a book long before condemned as heretical.

[1] We have translated *lacusque* by "the Pit," as being the nearest English correlative. Dante probably meant by it the several circles of his Hell, narrowing, one beneath the other, to the centre. As a curious specimen of English we subjoin Professor de Vericour's translation: "I have sang the rights of monarchy; I have sang, in exploring them, the abode of God, the Phlegethon and the impure lakes, as long as destinies have permitted. But as the part of myself, which was only passing, returns to better fields, and happier, returned to his Maker, I, Dante, exiled from

If these be not the words of Dante, what is internal evidence worth? The indomitably self-reliant man, loyal first of all to his most unpopular convictions (his very host, Guido, being a Guelph), puts his Ghibellinism (*jura monarchiæ*) in the front. The man whose whole life, like that of selected souls always, had been a warfare, calls heaven another camp, — a better one, thank God! The wanderer of so many years speaks of his soul as a guest, — glad to be gone, doubtless. The exile, whose sharpest reproaches of Florence are always those of an outraged lover, finds it bitter that even his unconscious bones should lie in alien soil.

Giovanni Villani, the earliest authority, and a contemporary, thus sketches him: "This man was a great scholar in almost every science, though a layman; was a most excellent poet, philosopher, and rhetorician; perfect, as well in composing and versifying as in haranguing; a most noble speaker. . . . This Dante, on account of his learning, was a little haughty, and shy, and disdainful, and like a philosopher almost ungracious, knew not well how to deal with unlettered folk." Benvenuto da Imola tells us that he was very abstracted, as we may well believe of a man who carried the *Commedia* in his brain. Boccaccio paints him in this wise: "Our poet was of middle height; his face was long, his nose aquiline, his jaw large, and the lower lip protruding somewhat beyond the upper; a little stoop-

the regions of fatherland, I am laid here, I, to whom Florence gave birth, a mother who experienced but a feeble love." (*The Life and Times of Dante*, London, 1858, p. 208.)

ing in the shoulders; his eyes rather large than small; dark of complexion; his hair and beard thick, crisp, and black; and his countenance always sad and thoughtful. His garments were always dignified; the style such as suited ripeness of years; his gait was grave and gentlemanlike; and his bearing, whether public or private, wonderfully composed and polished. In meat and drink he was most temperate, nor was ever any more zealous in study or whatever other pursuit. Seldom spake he, save when spoken to, though a most eloquent person. In his youth he delighted especially in music and singing, and was intimate with almost all the singers and musicians of his day. He was much inclined to solitude, and familiar with few, and most assiduous in study as far as he could find time for it. Dante was also of marvellous capacity and the most tenacious memory." Various anecdotes of him are related by Boccaccio, Sacchetti, and others, none of them verisimilar, and some of them at least fifteen centuries old when revamped. Most of them are neither *veri* nor *ben trovati*. One clear glimpse we get of him from the *Ottimo Comento*, the author of which says:[1] "I, the writer, heard Dante say that never a rhyme had led him to say other than he would, but that many a time and oft (*molte e spesse volte*) he had made words say for him what they were not wont to express for other poets." That is the only sincere glimpse we get of the living, breathing, word-compelling Dante.

[1] *Inferno*, X. 85.

Looked at outwardly, the life of Dante seems to have been an utter and disastrous failure. What its inward satisfactions must have been, we, with the *Paradiso* open before us, can form some faint conception. To him, longing with an intensity which only the word *Dantesque* will express to realize an ideal upon earth, and continually baffled and misunderstood, the far greater part of his mature life must have been labor and sorrow. We can see how essential all that sad experience was to him, can understand why all the fairy stories hide the luck in the ugly black casket; but to him, then and there, how seemed it?

> Thou shalt relinquish everything of thee,
> Beloved most dearly; this that arrow is
> Shot from the bow of exile first of all;
> And thou shalt prove how salt a savor hath
> The bread of others, and how hard a path
> To climb and to descend the stranger's stairs![1]

Come sa di sale. Who never wet his bread with tears, says Goethe, knows ye not, ye heavenly powers! Our nineteenth century made an idol of the noble lord who broke his heart in verse once every six months, but the fourteenth was lucky enough to produce and not to make an idol of that rarest earthly phenomenon, a man of genius who could hold heartbreak at bay for twenty years, and would not let himself die till he had done his task. At the end of the *Vita Nuova*, his first work, Dante wrote down that remarkable aspiration that God would take him to himself after he had written

[1] *Paradiso*, XVII.

of Beatrice such things as were never yet written of woman. It was literally fulfilled when the *Commedia* was finished twenty-five years later. Scarce was Dante at rest in his grave when Italy felt instinctively that this was her great man. Boccaccio tells us that in 1329[1] Cardinal Poggetto (du Poiet) caused Dante's treatise *De Monarchia* to be publicly burned at Bologna, and proposed further to dig up and burn the bones of the poet at Ravenna, as having been a heretic; but so much opposition was roused that he thought better of it. Yet this was during the pontificate of the Frenchman, John XXII., the reproof of whose simony Dante puts in the mouth of St. Peter, who declares his seat vacant,[2] whose damnation the poet himself seems to prophesy,[3] and against whose election he had endeavored to persuade the cardinals, in a vehement letter. In 1350 the republic of Florence voted the sum of ten golden florins to be paid by the hands of Messer Giovanni Boccaccio to Dante's daughter Beatrice, a nun in the convent of Santa Chiara at Ravenna. In 1396 Florence voted a monument, and begged in vain for the metaphorical ashes of the man of whom she had threatened to make literal cinders if she could catch him alive. In 1429[4] she begged again, but Ravenna, a dead city, was tenacious of the dead poet. In 1519 Michael An-

[1] He says after the return of Louis of Bavaria to Germany, which took place in that year. The *De Monarchia* was afterward condemned by the Council of Trent.

[2] *Paradiso*, XXVII.

[3] *Inferno*, XI.

[4] See the letter in Gaye, *Carteggio inedito d' artisti*, vol. i. p. 123.

gelo would have built the monument, but Leo X. refused to allow the sacred dust to be removed. Finally, in 1829, five hundred and eight years after the death of Dante, Florence got a cenotaph fairly built in Santa Croce (by Ricci), ugly beyond even the usual lot of such, with three colossal figures on it, Dante in the middle, with Italy on one side and Poesy on the other. The tomb at Ravenna, built originally in 1483, by the father of Cardinal Bembo, was restored by Cardinal Corsi in 1692, and finally rebuilt in its present form by Cardinal Gonzaga, in 1780, all three of whom commemorated themselves in Latin inscriptions. It is a little shrine covered with a dome, not unlike the tomb of a Mohammedan saint, and is now the chief magnet which draws foreigners and their gold to Ravenna. The *valet de place* says that Dante is not buried under it, but beneath the pavement of the street in front of it, where also, he says, he saw my Lord Byron kneel and weep. Like everything in Ravenna, it is dirty and neglected.

In 1373 (August 9) Florence instituted a chair of the *Divina Commedia*, and Boccaccio was named first professor. He accordingly began his lectures on Sunday, October 3, following, but his comment was broken off abruptly at the 17th verse of the 17th canto of the *Inferno* by the illness which ended in his death, December 21, 1375. Among his successors were Filippo Villani and Filelfo. Bologna was the first to follow the example of Florence, Benvenuto da Imola having begun his lectures, according to Tiraboschi, so early as 1375. Chairs

were established also at Pisa, Venice, Piacenza, and Milan before the close of the century. The lectures were delivered in the churches and on feast-days, which shows their popular character. Balbo reckons (but this, though probable, is guess-work) that the MS. copies of the *Divina Commedia* made during the fourteenth century, and now existing in the libraries of Europe, are more numerous than those of all other works, ancient and modern, made during the same period. Between the invention of printing and the year 1500 more than twenty editions were published in Italy, the earliest in 1472. During the sixteenth century there were forty editions; during the seventeenth, — a period, for Italy, of sceptical dilettantism, — only three; during the eighteenth, thirty-four; and already, during the first half of the nineteenth, at least eighty. The first translation was into Catalan, in 1428.[1] M. St. René Taillandier says that the *Commedia* was condemned by the inquisition in Spain; but this seems too general a statement, for, according to Foscolo,[2] it was the commentary of Landino and Vellutello, and a few verses in the *Inferno* and *Paradiso*, which were condemned. The first French translation was that of Grangier, 1596, but the study of Dante struck no root there till the present century. Rivarol, who translated the *Inferno* in 1783, was the first Frenchman who divined the wonderful force and vitality of the

[1] St. René Taillandier, in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, December 1, 1856, says into Spanish

[2] *Dante*, vol. iv. p. 116.

Commedia.[1] The expressions of Voltaire represent very well the average opinion of cultivated persons in respect of Dante in the middle of the eighteenth century. He says: "The Italians call him divine; but it is a hidden divinity; few people understand his oracles. He has commentators, which, perhaps, is another reason for his not being understood. His reputation will go on increasing, because scarce anybody reads him."[2] To Father Bettinelli he writes: "I estimate highly the courage with which you have dared to say that Dante was a madman and his work a monster." But he adds, what shows that Dante had his admirers even in that flippant century: "There are found among us, and in the eighteenth century, people who strive to admire imaginations so stupidly extravagant and barbarous."[3] Elsewhere he says that the *Commedia* was "an odd poem, but gleaming with natural beauties, a work in which the author rose in parts above the bad taste of his age and his subject, and full of passages written as purely as if they had been of the time of Ariosto and Tasso."[4] It is curious to see this antipathetic fascination which Dante exercised over a nature so opposite to his own.

At the beginning of this century Châteaubriand speaks of Dante with vague commendation, evidently from a very superficial acquaintance, and

[1] Ste. Beuve, *Causeries du Lundi*, tome xi. p. 169.
[2] *Dict. Phil.*, art. "Dante."
[3] *Corresp. gén.*, Œuvres, tome lvii. pp. 80, 81.
[4] *Essai sur les mœurs*, Œuvres, tome xvii. pp. 371, 372.

that only with the *Inferno*, probably from Rivarol's version.[1] Since then there have been four or five French versions in prose or verse, including one by Lamennais. But the austerity of Dante will not condescend to the conventional elegance which makes the charm of French, and the most virile of poets cannot be adequately rendered in the most feminine of languages. Yet in the works of Fauriel, Ozanam, Ampère, and Villemain, France has given a greater impulse to the study of Dante than any other country except Germany. Into Germany the *Commedia* penetrated later. How utterly Dante was unknown there in the sixteenth century is plain from a passage in the "Vanity of the Arts and Sciences" of Cornelius Agrippa, where he is spoken of among the authors of lascivious stories: "There have been many of these historical pandars, of which some of obscure fame, as Æneas Sylvius, Dantes, and Petrarch, Boccace, Pontanus," etc.[2] The first German translation was that of Bachenschwanz (1767–69). Versions by Kannegiesser, Streckfuss, Kopisch, and Prince John of Saxony, followed. Goethe seems never to have given that attention to Dante which his ever-alert intelligence might have been expected to bestow on so imposing a moral and æsthetic phenomenon. Unless the conclusion of the second part of "Faust" be an inspiration of the *Paradiso*, we remember no adequate word from him on this theme. His remarks on one of the German translations are brief, dry,

[1] *Génie du Christianisme*, cap. iv.

[2] Ed. Lond. 1684, p. 199.

and without that breadth which comes only of thorough knowledge and sympathy. But German scholarship and constructive criticism, through Witte, Kopisch, Wegele, Ruth, and others, have been of preëminent service in deepening the understanding and facilitating the study of the poet. In England the first recognition of Dante is by Chaucer in the "Hugelin of Pisa" of the "Monkes Tale,"[1] and an imitation of the opening verses of the third canto of the *Inferno* ("Assembly of Foules"). In 1417 Giovanni da Serravalle, bishop of Fermo, completed a Latin prose translation of the *Commedia*, a copy of which, as he made it at the request of two English bishops whom he met at the council of Constance, was doubtless sent to England. Later we find Dante now and then mentioned, but evidently from hearsay only,[2] till the time of Spenser, who, like Milton fifty years later, shows that he had read his works closely. Thenceforward for more than a century Dante became a mere name, used without meaning by literary sciolists. Lord Chesterfield echoes Voltaire, and Dr. Drake in his "Literary Hours"[3] could

[1] It is worth notice, as a proof of Chaucer's critical judgment, that he calls Dante "the great poet of Itaille," while in the "Clerke's Tale" he speaks of Petrarch as a "worthy clerk," as "the laureat poete" (alluding to the somewhat sentimental ceremony at Rome), and says that his

"Rhetorike sweete
Enlumined all Itaille of poetry."

[2] It is probable that Sackville may have read the *Inferno*, and it is certain that Sir John Harrington had. See the preface to his translation of the *Orlando Furioso*.

[3] Second edition, 1800.

speak of Darwin's "Botanic Garden" as showing the "wild and terrible sublimity of Dante"! The first complete English translation was by Boyd, — of the *Inferno* in 1785, of the whole poem in 1802. There have been eight other complete translations, beginning with Cary's in 1814, six since 1850, beside several of the *Inferno* singly. Of these that of Longfellow is the best. It is only within the last twenty years, however, that the study of Dante, in any true sense, became at all general. Even Coleridge seems to have been familiar only with the *Inferno*. In America Professor Ticknor was the first to devote a special course of illustrative lectures to Dante; he was followed by Longfellow, whose lectures, illustrated by admirable translations, are remembered with grateful pleasure by many who were thus led to learn the full significance of the great Christian poet. A translation of the *Inferno* into quatrains by T. W. Parsons ranks with the best for spirit, faithfulness, and elegance. In Denmark and Russia translations of the *Inferno* have been published, beside separate volumes of comment and illustration. We have thus sketched the steady growth of Dante's fame and influence to a universality unparalleled except in the case of Shakespeare, perhaps more remarkable if we consider the abstruse and mystical nature of his poetry. It is to be noted as characteristic that the veneration of Dantophilists for their master is that of disciples for their saint. Perhaps no other man could have called forth such an expression as that of Ruskin, that "the central man of all the

world, as representing in perfect balance the imaginative, moral, and intellectual faculties, all at their highest, is Dante."

The first remark to be made upon the writings of Dante is that they are all (with the possible exception of the treatise *De Vulgari Eloquio*) autobiographic, and that all of them, including that, are parts of a mutually related system, of which the central point is the individuality and experience of the poet. In the *Vita Nuova* he recounts the story of his love for Beatrice Portinari, showing how his grief for her loss turned his thoughts first inward upon his own consciousness, and, failing all help there, gradually upward through philosophy to religion, and so from a world of shadows to one of eternal substances. It traces with exquisite unconsciousness the gradual but certain steps by which memory and imagination transubstantiated the woman of flesh and blood into a holy ideal, combining in one radiant symbol of sorrow and hope that faith which is the instinctive refuge of unavailing regret, that grace of God which higher natures learn to find in the trial which passeth all understanding, and that perfect womanhood, the dream of youth and the memory of maturity, which beckons toward the forever unattainable. As a contribution to the physiology of genius, no other book is to be compared with the *Vita Nuova*. It is more important to the understanding of Dante as a poet than any other of his works. It shows him (and that in the midst of affairs demanding practical ability and presence

of mind) capable of a depth of contemplative abstraction, equalling that of a Soofi who has passed the fourth step of initiation. It enables us in some sort to see how, from being the slave of his imaginative faculty, he rose by self-culture and force of will to that mastery of it which is art. We comprehend the *Commedia* better when we know that Dante could be an active, clear-headed politician and a mystic at the same time. Various dates have been assigned to the composition of the *Vita Nuova*. The earliest limit is fixed by the death of Beatrice in 1290 (though some of the poems are of even earlier date), and the book is commonly assumed to have been finished by 1295; Foscolo says 1294. But Professor Karl Witte, a high authority, extends the term as far as 1300.[1] The title of the book also, *Vita Nuova*, has been diversely interpreted. Mr. Garrow, who published an English version of it at Florence in 1846, entitles it the "Early Life of Dante." Balbo understands it in the same way.[2] But we are strongly of the opinion that "New Life" is the interpretation sustained by the entire significance of the book itself.

His next work in order of date is the treatise *De Monarchia*. It has been generally taken for granted that Dante was a Guelph in politics up to the time of his banishment, and that out of resentment he then became a violent Ghibelline. Not to

[1] *Dante Alighieri's lyrische Gedichte*, Leipzig, 1842, Theil II. pp. 4–9.

[2] *Vita*, p. 97.

speak of the consideration that there is no author whose life and works present so remarkable a unity and logical sequence as those of Dante, Professor Witte has drawn attention to a fact which alone is enough to demonstrate that the *De Monarchia* was written before 1300. That and the *Vita Nuova* are the only works of Dante in which no allusion whatever is made to his exile. That bitter thought was continually present to him. In the *Convito* it betrays itself often, and with touching unexpectedness. Even in the treatise *De Vulgari Eloquio*, he takes as one of his examples of style: "I have most pity for those, whosoever they are, that languish in exile, and revisit their country only in dreams." We have seen that the one decisive act of Dante's priorate was to expel from Florence the chiefs of both parties as the sowers of strife, and he tells us (*Paradiso*, XVII.) that he had formed a party by himself. The king of Saxony has well defined his political theory as being "an ideal Ghibellinism,"[1] and he has been accused of want of patriotism only by those short-sighted persons who cannot see beyond their own parish. Dante's want of faith in freedom was of the same kind with Milton's refusing (as Tacitus had done before) to confound license with liberty. The argument of the *De Monarchia* is briefly this: As the object of the individual man is the highest development of his faculties, so is it also with men united in societies. But the individual can only attain the highest development when all his powers

[1] *Comment on Paradiso*, VI.

are in absolute subjection to the intellect, and society only when it subjects its individual caprices to an intelligent head. This is the order of nature, as in families, and men have followed it in the organization of villages, towns, cities. Again, since God made man in his own image, men and societies most nearly resemble him in proportion as they approach unity. But as in all societies questions must arise, so there is need of a monarch for supreme arbiter. And only a universal monarch can be impartial enough for this, since kings of limited territories would always be liable to the temptation of private ends. With the internal policy of municipalities, commonwealths, and kingdoms, the monarch would have nothing to do, only interfering when there was danger of an infraction of the general peace. This is the doctrine of the first book, enforced sometimes eloquently, always logically, and with great fertility of illustration. It is an enlargement of some of the *obiter dicta* of the *Convito*. The earnestness with which peace is insisted on as a necessary postulate of civic well-being shows what the experience had been out of which Dante had constructed his theory. It is to be looked on as a purely scholastic demonstration of a speculative thesis, in which the manifold exceptions and modifications essential in practical application are necessarily left aside. Dante almost forestalls the famous proposition of Calvin, "that it is possible to conceive a people without a prince, but not a prince without a people," when he says, *Non enim gens propter regem, sed e con-*

verso rex propter gentem.[1] And in his letter to the princes and peoples of Italy on the coming of Henry VII., he bids them "obey their prince, but so as freemen preserving their own constitutional forms." He says also expressly: *Animadvertendum sane, quod cum dicitur humanum genus potest regi per unum supremum principem, non sic intelligendum est ut ab illo uno prodire possint municipia et leges municipales. Habent namque nationes, regna, et civitates inter se proprietates quas legibus differentibus regulari oportet.* Schlosser the historian compares Dante's system with that of the United States.[2] It in some respects resembled more the constitution of the Netherlands under the supreme stadtholder, but parallels between ideal and actual institutions are always unsatisfactory.[3]

The second book is very curious. In it Dante endeavors to demonstrate the divine right of the Roman Empire to universal sovereignty. One of his arguments is, that Christ consented to be born under the reign of Augustus; another, that he assented to the imperial jurisdiction in allowing himself to be crucified under a decree of one of its courts. The atonement could not have been accomplished unless Christ suffered under sentence of a court having jurisdiction, for otherwise his condem-

[1] Jean de Meung had already said, —

"Ge n'en met hors rois ne prélas

. . . . . .

Qu'il sunt tui serf au menu pueple."

(*Roman de la Rose* (ed. Méon), v. ii. pp. 78, 79.)

[2] Dante, *Studien*, etc., 1855, p. 144.

[3] Compare also Spinoza, *Tractat. polit.*, cap. vi.

nation would have been an injustice and not a penalty. Moreover, since all mankind was typified in the person of Christ, the court must have been one having jurisdiction over all mankind; and since he was delivered to Pilate, an officer of Tiberius, it must follow that the jurisdiction of Tiberius was universal. He draws an argument also from the wager of battle to prove that the Roman Empire was divinely permitted, at least, if not instituted. For since it is admitted that God gives the victory, and since the Romans always won it, therefore it was God's will that the Romans should attain universal empire. In the third book he endeavors to prove that the emperor holds by divine right, and not by permission of the pope. He assigns supremacy to the pope in spirituals, and to the emperor in temporals. This was a delicate subject, and though the king of Saxony (a Catholic) says that Dante did not overstep the limits of orthodoxy, it was on account of this part of the book that it was condemned as heretical.[1]

Next follows the treatise *De Vulgari Eloquio.* Though we have doubts whether we possess this book as Dante wrote it, inclining rather to think that it is a copy in some parts textually exact, in others an abstract, there can be no question either of its great glossological value or that it conveys the opinions of Dante. We put it next in order, though written later than the *Convito*, only because,

[1] It is instructive to compare Dante's political treatise with those of Aristotle and Spinoza. We thus see more clearly the limitations of the age in which he lived, and this may help us to a broader view of him as poet.

like the *De Monarchia*, it is written in Latin. It is a proof of the national instinct of Dante, and of his confidence in his genius, that he should have chosen to write all his greatest works in what was deemed by scholars a *patois*, but which he more than any other man made a classic language. Had he intended the *De Monarchia* for a political pamphlet, he would certainly not have composed it in the dialect of the few. The *De Vulgari Eloquio* was to have been in four books. Whether it was ever finished or not it is impossible to say; but only two books have come down to us. It treats of poetizing in the vulgar tongue, and of the different dialects of Italy. From the particularity with which it treats of the dialect of Bologna, it has been supposed to have been written in that city, or at least to furnish an argument in favor of Dante's having at some time studied there. In lib. ii. cap. ii., is a remarkable passage in which, defining the various subjects of song and what had been treated in the vulgar tongue by different poets, he says that his own theme had been righteousness.

The *Convito* is also imperfect. It was to have consisted of fourteen treatises, but, as we have it, contains only four. In the first he justifies the use of the vulgar idiom in preference to the Latin. In the other three he comments on three of his own *Canzoni*. It will be impossible to give an adequate analysis of this work in the limits allowed us.[1] It is an epitome of the learning of that age,

[1] A very good one may be found in the sixth volume of the Molini edition of Dante, pp. 391–433.

philosophical, theological, and scientific. As affording illustration of the *Commedia*, and of Dante's style of thought, it is invaluable. It is reckoned by his countrymen the first piece of Italian prose, and there are parts of it which still stand unmatched for eloquence and pathos. The Italians (even such a man as Cantù among the rest) find in it and a few passages of the *Commedia* the proof that Dante, as a natural philosopher, was wholly in advance of his age, — that he had, among other things, anticipated Newton in the theory of gravitation. But this is as idle as the claim that Shakespeare had discovered the circulation of the blood before Harvey,[1] and one might as well attempt to dethrone Newton because Chaucer speaks of the love which draws the apple to the earth. The truth is, that it was only as a poet that Dante was great and original (glory enough, surely, to have not more than two competitors), and in matters of science, as did all his contemporaries, sought the guiding hand of Aristotle like a child. Dante is assumed by many to have been a Platonist, but this is not true, in the strict sense of the word. Like all men of great imagination, he was an idealist, and so far a Platonist, as Shakespeare might be proved to have been by his sonnets. But Dante's direct acquaintance with Plato may be reckoned at zero, and we consider it as having strongly influenced his artistic development for the better, that transcendentalist as he was by nature, so much so as to be in danger of lapsing into

[1] See Field's *Theory of Colors*.

an Oriental mysticism, his habits of thought should have been made precise and his genius disciplined by a mind so severely logical as that of Aristotle. This does not conflict with what we believe to be equally true, that the Platonizing commentaries on his poem, like that of Landino, are the most satisfactory. Beside the prose already mentioned, we have a small collection of Dante's letters, the recovery of the larger number of which we owe to Professor Witte. They are all interesting, some of them especially so, as illustrating the prophetic character with which Dante invested himself. The longest is one addressed to Can Grande della Scala, explaining the intention of the *Commedia* and the method to be employed in its interpretation. The authenticity of this letter has been doubted, but is now generally admitted.

We shall barely allude to the minor poems, full of grace and depth of mystic sentiment, and which would have given Dante a high place in the history of Italian literature, even had he written nothing else. They are so abstract, however, that without the extrinsic interest of having been written by the author of the *Commedia*, they would probably find few readers. All that is certainly known in regard to the *Commedia* is that it was composed during the nineteen years which intervened between Dante's banishment and death. Attempts have been made to fix precisely the dates of the different parts, but without success, and the differences of opinion are bewildering. Foscolo has constructed an ingenious and forcible argument to

show that no part of the poem was published before the author's death. The question depends somewhat on the meaning we attach to the word "published." In an age of manuscript the wide dispersion of a poem so long even as a single one of the three divisions of the *Commedia* would be accomplished very slowly. But it is difficult to account for the great fame which Dante enjoyed during the latter years of his life, unless we suppose that parts, at least, of his greatest work had been read or heard by a large number of persons. This need not, however, imply publication; and Witte, whose opinion is entitled to great consideration, supposes even the *Inferno* not to have been finished before 1314 or 1315. In a matter where certainty would be impossible, it is of little consequence to reproduce conjectural dates. In the letter to Can Grande, before alluded to, Dante himself has stated the theme of his song. He says that "the literal subject of the whole work is the state of the soul after death simply considered. But if the work be taken allegorically, the subject is man, as by merit or demerit, through freedom of the will, he renders himself liable to the reward or punishment of justice." He tells us that the work is to be interpreted in a literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical sense, a mode then commonly employed with the Scriptures,[1] and of which he gives the following example: "To make which mode of treatment more clear, it may be applied in the following verses: *In exitu Israel de Ægypto, domus Jacob*

[1] As by Dante himself in the *Convito*.

de populo barbaro, facta est Judæa sanctificatio ejus, Israel potestas ejus.[1] For if we look only at the literal sense, it signifies the going out of the children of Israel from Egypt in the time of Moses; if at the allegorical, it signifies our redemption through Christ; if at the moral, it signifies the conversion of the soul from the grief and misery of sin to a state of grace; and if at the anagogical, it signifies the passage of the blessed soul from the bondage of this corruption to the freedom of eternal glory." A Latin couplet, cited by one of the old commentators, puts the matter compactly together for us: —

> "*Litera* gesta refert; quid credas *allegoria*;
> *Moralis* quid agas; quid speres *anagogia*."

Dante tells us that he calls his poem a comedy because it has a fortunate ending, and gives its title thus: "Here begins the comedy of Dante Alighieri, a Florentine by birth, but not in morals."[2] The poem consists of three parts, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. Each part is divided into thirty-three cantos, in allusion to the years of the Saviour's life; for though the Hell contains thirty-four, the first canto is merely introductory. In the form of the verse (triple rhyme) we may find an emblem of the Trinity, and in the three divisions, of the threefold state of man, sin, grace, and beatitude. Symbolic meanings reveal themselves, or make themselves suspected, everywhere, as in the architecture of the Middle Ages. An analysis of the poem

[1] Psalm cxiv. 1, 2.

[2] He commonly prefaced his letters with some such phrase as *exul immeritus*.

would be out of place here, but we must say a few words of Dante's position as respects modern literature. If we except Wolfram von Eschenbach, he is the first Christian poet, the first (indeed, we might say the only) one whose whole system of thought is colored in every finest fibre by a purely Christian theology. Lapse through sin, mediation, and redemption, these are the subjects of the three parts of the poem: or, otherwise stated, intellectual conviction of the result of sin, typified in Virgil (symbol also of that imperialism whose origin he sang); moral conversion after repentance, by divine grace, typified in Beatrice; reconciliation with God, and actual blinding vision of him — "The pure in heart shall see God." Here are general truths which any Christian may accept and find comfort in. But the poem comes nearer to us than this. It is the real history of a brother man, of a tempted, purified, and at last triumphant human soul; it teaches the benign ministry of sorrow, and that the ladder of that faith by which man climbs to the actual fruition of things not seen *ex quovis ligno non fit*, but only of the cross manfully borne. The poem is also, in a very intimate sense, an apotheosis of woman. Indeed, as Marvell's drop of dew mirrored the whole firmament, so we find in the *Commedia* the image of the Middle Ages, and the sentimental gyniolatry of chivalry, which was at best but skin-deep, is lifted in Beatrice to an ideal and universal plane. It is the same with Catholicism, with imperialism, with the scholastic philosophy; and nothing is more wonderful than the power of

absorption and assimilation in this man, who could take up into himself the world that then was, and reproduce it with such cosmopolitan truth to human nature and to his own individuality, as to reduce all contemporary history to a mere comment on his vision. We protest, therefore, against the parochial criticism which would degrade Dante to a mere partisan, which sees in him a Luther before his time, and would clap the *bonnet rouge* upon his heavenly muse.

Like all great artistic minds, Dante was essentially conservative, and, arriving precisely in that period of transition when Church and Empire were entering upon the modern epoch of thought, he strove to preserve both by presenting the theory of both in a pristine and ideal perfection. The whole nature of Dante was one of intense belief. There is proof upon proof that he believed himself invested with a divine mission. Like the Hebrew prophets, with whose writings his whole soul was imbued, it was back to the old worship and the God of the fathers that he called his people; and not Isaiah himself was more destitute of that humor, that sense of ludicrous contrast, which is an essential in the composition of a sceptic. In Dante's time, learning had something of a sacred character; the line was hardly yet drawn between the clerk and the possessor of supernatural powers; it was with the next generation, with the elegant Petrarch, even more truly than with the kindly Boccaccio, that the purely literary life, and that dilettantism, which is the twin sister of scepticism, began. As a merely

literary figure, the position of Dante is remarkable. Not only as respects thought, but as respects æsthetics also, his great poem stands as a monument on the boundary line between the ancient and modern. He not only marks, but is in himself, the transition. *Arma virumque cano*, that is the motto of classic song; the things of this world and great men. Dante says, *subjectum est homo*, not *vir;* my theme is man, not a man. The scene of the old epic and drama was in this world, and its catastrophe here; Dante lays his scene in the human soul, and his fifth act in the other world. He makes himself the protagonist of his own drama. In the *Commedia* for the first time Christianity wholly revolutionizes Art, and becomes its seminal principle. But æsthetically also, as well as morally, Dante stands between the old and the new, and reconciles them. The theme of his poem is purely subjective, modern, what is called romantic; but its treatment is objective (almost to realism, here and there), and it is limited by a form of classic severity. In the same way he sums up in himself the two schools of modern poetry which had preceded him, and, while essentially lyrical in his subject, is epic in the handling of it. So also he combines the deeper and more abstract religious sentiment of the Teutonic races with the scientific precision and absolute systematism of the Romanic. In one respect Dante stands alone. While we can in some sort account for such representative men as Voltaire and Goethe (nay, even Shakespeare) by the intellectual and moral fermentation of the

age in which they lived, Dante seems morally isolated and to have drawn his inspiration almost wholly from his own internal reserves. Of his mastery in style we need say little here. Of his mere language, nothing could be better than the expression of Rivarol: "His verse holds itself erect by the mere force of the substantive and verb, without the help of a single epithet." We will only add a word on what seems to us an extraordinary misapprehension of Coleridge, who disparages Dante by comparing his Lucifer with Milton's Satan. He seems to have forgotten that the precise measurements of Dante were not prosaic, but absolutely demanded by the nature of his poem. He is describing an actual journey, and his exactness makes a part of the verisimilitude. We read the "Paradise Lost" as a poem, the *Commedia* as a record of fact; and no one can read Dante without believing his story, for it is plain that he believed it himself. It is false æsthetics to confound the grandiose with the imaginative. Milton's angels are not to be compared with Dante's, at once real and supernatural; and the Deity of Milton is a Calvinistic Zeus, while nothing in all poetry approaches the imaginative grandeur of Dante's vision of God at the conclusion of the *Paradiso*. In all literary history there is no such figure as Dante, no such homogeneousness of life and works, such loyalty to ideas, such sublime irrecognition of the unessential; and there is no moral more touching than that the contemporary recognition of such a nature, so endowed and so faithful to its endowment, should be

summed up in the sentence of Florence: *Igne comburatur sic quod moriatur.*[1]

The range of Dante's influence is not less remarkable than its intensity. Minds, the antipodes of each other in temper and endowment, alike feel the force of his attraction, the pervasive comfort of his light and warmth. Boccaccio and Lamennais are touched with the same reverential enthusiasm. The imaginative Ruskin is rapt by him, as we have seen, perhaps beyond the limit where critical appreciation merges in enthusiasm; and the matter-of-fact Schlosser tells us that "he, who was wont to contemplate earthly life wholly in an earthly light, has made use of Dante, Landino, and Vellutello in his solitude to bring a heavenly light into his inward life." Almost all other poets have their seasons, but Dante penetrates to the moral core of those who once fairly come within his sphere, and possesses them wholly. His readers turn students, his students zealots, and what was a taste becomes a religion. The homeless exile finds a home in thousands of grateful hearts. *E venne da esilio in questa pace!*

[1] In order to fix more precisely in the mind the place of Dante in relation to the history of thought, literature, and events, we subjoin a few dates: Dante born, 1265; end of Crusades, death of St. Louis, 1270; Aquinas died, 1274; Bonaventura died, 1274; Giotto born, 1276; Albertus Magnus died, 1280; Sicilian vespers, 1282; death of Ugolino and Francesca da Rimini, 1282; death of Beatrice, 1290; Roger Bacon died, 1292; death of Cimabue, 1302; Dante's banishment, 1302; Petrarch born, 1304; Fra Dolcino burned, 1307; Pope Clement V. at Avignon, 1309; Templars suppressed, 1312; Boccaccio born, 1313; Dante died, 1321; Wycliffe born, 1324; Chaucer born, 1328.

Every kind of objection, æsthetic and other, may be, and has been, made to the *Divina Commedia*, especially by critics who have but a superficial acquaintance with it, or rather with the *Inferno*, which is as far as most English critics go. Coleridge himself, who had a way of divining what was in books, may be justly suspected of not going further, though with Cary to help him. Mr. Carlyle, who has said admirable things of Dante the man, was very imperfectly read in Dante the author, or he would never have put Sordello in hell and the meeting with Beatrice in paradise. In France it was not much better (though Rivarol has said the best thing hitherto of Dante's parsimony of epithet [1]) before Ozanam, who, if with decided ultramontane leanings, has written excellently well of our poet, and after careful study. Voltaire, though not without relentings toward a poet who had put popes heels upward in hell, regards him on the whole as a stupid monster and barbarian. It was no better in Italy, if we may trust Foscolo, who affirms that "neither Pelli nor others deservedly more celebrated than he ever read attentively the poem of Dante, perhaps never ran through it from

[1] Rivarol characterized only a single quality of Dante's style, who knew how to spend as well as spare. Even the *Inferno*, on which he based his remark, might have put him on his guard. Dante understood very well the use of ornament in its fitting place. *Est enim exornatio alicujus convenientis additio*, he tells us in his *De Vulgari Eloquio* (lib. ii. C. ii.). His simile of the doves (*Inferno*, V. 82 et seq.), perhaps the most exquisite in all poetry, quite oversteps Rivarol's narrow limit of "substantive and verb."

the first verse to the last."[1] Accordingly we have heard that the *Commedia* was a sermon, a political pamphlet, the revengeful satire of a disappointed Ghibelline, nay, worse, of a turncoat Guelph. It is narrow, it is bigoted, it is savage, it is theological, it is mediæval, it is heretical, it is scholastic, it is obscure, it is pedantic, its Italian is not that of *la Crusca*, its ideas are not those of an enlightened eighteenth century, it is everything, in short, that a poem should not be; and yet, singularly enough, the circle of its charm has widened in proportion as men have receded from the theories of Church and State which are supposed to be its foundation, and as the modes of thought of its author have become more alien to those of his readers. In spite of all objections, some of which are well founded, the *Commedia* remains one of the three or four universal books that have ever been written.

We may admit, with proper limitations, the modern distinction between the Artist and the Moralist. With the one Form is all in all, with the other Tendency. The aim of the one is to delight, of the other to convince. The one is master of his purpose, the other mastered by it. The whole range of perception and thought is valuable to the one as it will minister to imagination, to the other only as it is available for argument. With the moralist use is beauty, good only as it serves an ulterior purpose; with the artist beauty is use, good in and for itself. In the fine arts the vehicle makes part of the thought, coalesces with it. The living con-

[1] *Discorso sul testo*, ec., § XVIII.

ception shapes itself a body in marble, color, or modulated sound, and henceforth the two are inseparable. The results of the moralist pass into the intellectual atmosphere of mankind, it matters little by what mode of conveyance. But where, as in Dante, the religious sentiment and the imagination are both organic, something interfused with the whole being of the man, so that they work in kindly sympathy, the moral will insensibly suffuse itself with beauty as a cloud with light. Then that fine sense of remote analogies, awake to the assonance between facts seemingly remote and unrelated, between the outward and inward worlds, though convinced that the things of this life are shadows, will be persuaded also that they are not fantastic merely, but imply a substance somewhere, and will love to set forth the beauty of the visible image because it suggests the ineffably higher charm of the unseen original. Dante's ideal of life, the enlightening and strengthening of that native instinct of the soul which leads it to strive backward toward its divine source, may sublimate the senses till each becomes a window for the light of truth and the splendor of God to shine through. In him as in Calderon the perpetual presence of imagination not only glorifies the philosophy of life and the science of theology, but idealizes both in symbols of material beauty. Though Dante's conception of the highest end of man was that he should climb through every phase of human experience to that transcendental and supersensual region where the true, the good, and the beautiful blend

in the white light of God, yet the prism of his imagination forever resolved the ray into color again, and he loved to show it also where, entangled and obstructed in matter, it became beautiful once more to the eye of sense. Speculation, he tells us, is the use, without any mixture, of our noblest part (the reason). And this part cannot in this life have its perfect use, which is to behold God (who is the highest object of the intellect), except inasmuch as the intellect considers and beholds him in his effects.[1] Underlying Dante the metaphysician, statesman, and theologian, was always Dante the poet,[2] irradiating and vivifying, gleaming through in a picturesque phrase, or touching things unexpectedly with that ideal light which softens and subdues like distance in the landscape. The stern outline of his system wavers and melts away before the eye of the reader in a mirage of imagination that lifts from beyond the sphere of vision and hangs in serener air images of infinite suggestion projected from worlds not realized, but substantial to faith, hope, and aspiration. Beyond the horizon

[1] *Convito*, Tr. IV. c. xxii.

[2] It is remarkable that when Dante, in 1297, as a preliminary condition to active politics, enrolled himself in the guild of physicians and apothecaries, he is qualified only with the title *poeta*. The arms of the Alighieri (curiously suitable to him who *sovra gli altri come aquila vola*) were a wing of gold in a field of azure. His vivid sense of beauty even hovers sometimes like a *corposant* over the somewhat stiff lines of his Latin prose. For example, in his letter to the kings and princes of Italy on the coming of Henry VII.: "A new day brightens, revealing the dawn which already scatters the shades of long calamity; already the breezes of morning gather; *the lips of heaven are reddening!*"

of speculation floats, in the passionless splendor of the empyrean, the city of our God, the Rome whereof Christ is a Roman,[1] the citadel of refuge, even in this life, for souls purified by sorrow and self-denial, transhumanized[2] to the divine abstraction of pure contemplation. "And it is called Empyrean," he says in his letter to Can Grande, "which is the same as a heaven blazing with fire or ardor, not because there is in it a material fire or burning, but a spiritual one, which is blessed love or charity." But this splendor he bodies forth, if sometimes quaintly, yet always vividly and most often in types of winning grace.

Dante was a mystic with a very practical turn of mind. A Platonist by nature, an Aristotelian by training, his feet keep closely to the narrow path of dialectics, because he believed it the safest, while his eyes are fixed on the stars and his brain is busy with things not demonstrable, save by that grace of God which passeth all understanding, nor capable of being told unless by far-off hints and adumbrations. Though he himself has directly explained the scope, the method, and the larger meaning of his greatest work,[3] though he has indirectly pointed out the way to its interpretation in the *Convito*, and though everything he wrote is but an explanatory comment on his own character and opinions, unmistakably clear and precise, yet both man and poem continue not only to be misunderstood popu-

[1] *Purgatorio*, XXXII. 100.

[2] *Paradiso*, I. 70.

[3] In a letter to Can Grande (XI. of the *Epistolæ*).

larly, but also by such as should know better.[1] That those who confined their studies to the *Commedia* should have interpreted it variously is not wonderful, for out of the first or literal meaning others open, one out of another, each of wider circuit and purer abstraction, like Dante's own heavens, giving and receiving light.[2] Indeed, Dante himself is partly to blame for this. "The form or mode of treatment," he says, "is poetic, fictive, descriptive, digressive, transumptive, and withal definitive, divisive, probative, improbative, and positive of examples." Here are conundrums enough, to be sure! To Italians at home, for whom the great arenas of political and religious speculation were closed, the temptation to find a subtler meaning than the real one was irresistible. Italians in exile, on the other hand, made Dante the stalking-horse from behind which they could take a long shot at Church and State, or at obscurer foes.[3] Infinitely touching and sacred to us is the instinct of intense sympathy which draws these latter toward

[1] Witte, Wegele, and Ruth in German, and Ozanam in French, have rendered ignorance of Dante inexcusable among men of culture.

[2] *Inferno*, VII. 75. "Nay, his style," says Miss Rossetti, "is more than concise: it is elliptical, it is recondite. A first thought often lies coiled up and hidden under a second; the words which state the conclusion involve the premises and develop the subject." (p. 3.)

[3] A complete vocabulary of Italian billingsgate might be selected from Biagioli. Or see the concluding pages of Nannucci's excellent tract, *Intorno alle voci usate da Dante*, Corfù, 1840. Even Foscolo could not always refrain. Dante should have taught them to shun such vulgarities. See *Inferno*, XXX. 131–148.

their great forerunner, *exul immeritus* like themselves.[1] But they have too often wrung a meaning from Dante which is injurious to the man and out of keeping with the ideas of his age. The aim in expounding a great poem should be, not to discover an endless variety of meanings often contradictory, but whatever it has of great and perennial significance; for such it must have, or it would long ago have ceased to be living and operative, would long ago have taken refuge in the Chartreuse of great libraries, dumb thenceforth to all mankind. We do not mean to say that this minute exegesis is useless or unpraiseworthy, but only that it should be subsidiary to the larger way. It serves to bring out more clearly what is very wonderful in Dante, namely, the omnipresence of his memory throughout the work, so that its intimate coherence does not exist in spite of the reconditeness and complexity of allusion, but is woven out of them. The poem has many senses, he tells us, and there can be no doubt of it; but it has also, and this alone will account for its fascination, a living soul

[1] "My Italy, my sweetest Italy, for having loved thee too much I have lost thee, and, perhaps, . . . ah, may God avert the omen! But more proud than sorrowful for an evil endured for thee alone, I continue to consecrate my vigils to thee alone. . . . An exile full of anguish, perchance, availed to sublime the more in thy Alighieri that lofty soul which was a beautiful gift of thy smiling sky; and an exile equally wearisome and undeserved now avails, perhaps, to sharpen my small genius so that it may penetrate into what he left written for thy instruction and for his glory." (Rossetti, *Disamina*, ec., p. 405.) Rossetti is himself a proof that a noble mind need not be narrowed by misfortune. His *Comment* (unhappily incomplete) is one of the most valuable and suggestive.

behind them all and informing all, an intense singleness of purpose, a core of doctrine simple, human, and wholesome, though it be also, to use his own phrase, the bread of angels.

Nor is this unity characteristic only of the *Divina Commedia*. All the works of Dante, with the possible exception of the *De Vulgari Eloquio* (which is unfinished), are component parts of a Whole Duty of Man mutually completing and interpreting one another. They are also, as truly as Wordsworth's "Prelude," a history of the growth of a poet's mind. Like the English poet he valued himself at a high rate, the higher no doubt after Fortune had made him outwardly cheap. *Sempre il magnanimo si magnifica in suo cuore; e così lo pusillanimo per contrario sempre si tiene meno che non è.*[1] As in the prose of Milton, whose striking likeness to Dante in certain prominent features of character has been remarked by Foscolo, there are in Dante's minor works continual allusions to himself of great value as material for his biographer. Those who read attentively will discover that the tenderness he shows toward Francesca and her lover did not spring from any friendship for her family, but was a constant quality of his nature, and that what is called his revengeful ferocity is truly the implacable resentment of a lofty mind and a lover of good against evil, whether showing itself in private or public life; perhaps

[1] The great-minded man ever magnifies himself in his heart, and in like manner the pusillanimous holds himself less than he is. (*Convito*, Tr. I. c. 11.)

hating the former manifestation of it the most because he believed it to be the root of the latter, — a faith which those who have watched the course of politics in a democracy, as he had, will be inclined to share. His gentleness is all the more striking by contrast, like that silken compensation which blooms out of the thorny stem of the cactus. His moroseness,[1] his party spirit, and his personal vindictiveness are all predicated upon the *Inferno*, and upon a misapprehension or careless reading even of that. Dante's zeal was not of that sentimental kind, quickly kindled and as soon quenched, that hovers on the surface of shallow minds,

> "Even as the flame of unctuous things is wont
> To move upon the outer surface only";[2]

it was the steady heat of an inward fire kindling the whole character of the man through and through, like the minarets of his own city of Dis.[3] He was, as seems distinctive in some degree of the Latinized races, an unflinching *a priori* logician, not unwilling to "syllogize invidious verities,"[4] wherever they might lead him, like Sigier, whom he has put in paradise, though more than suspected of heterodoxy. But at the same time, as we shall see, he

[1] Dante's notion of virtue was not that of an ascetic, nor has any one ever painted her in colors more soft and splendid than he in the *Convito*. She is "sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes," and he dwells on the delights of her love with a rapture which kindles and purifies. So far from making her an inquisitor, he says expressly that she "should be gladsome and not sullen in all her works." (*Convito*, Tr. I. c. 8.) "Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose"!

[2] *Inferno*, XIX. 28, 29.

[3] *Inferno*, VIII. 70–75.

[4] *Paradiso*, X. 138.

had something of the practical good sense of that Teutonic stock whence he drew a part of his blood, which prefers a malleable syllogism that can yield without breaking to the inevitable, but incalculable pressure of human nature and the stiffer logic of events. His theory of Church and State was not merely a fantastic one, but intended for the use and benefit of men as they were; and he allowed accordingly for aberrations, to which even the law of gravitation is forced to give place; how much more, then, any scheme whose very starting-point is the freedom of the will!

We are thankful for a commentator at last who passes dry-shod over the *turbide onde* of inappreciative criticism, and, quietly waving aside the thick atmosphere which has gathered about the character of Dante both as man and poet, opens for us his City of Doom with the divining-rod of reverential study. Miss Rossetti comes commended to our interest, not only as one of a family which seems to hold genius by the tenure of gavelkind, but as having a special claim by inheritance to a love and understanding of Dante. She writes English with a purity that has in it something of feminine softness with no lack of vigor or precision. Her lithe mind winds itself with surprising grace through the metaphysical and other intricacies of her subject. She brings to her work the refined enthusiasm of a cultivated woman and the penetration of sympathy. She has chosen the better way (in which Germany took the lead) of interpreting Dante out of himself, the pure spring from which,

and from which alone, he drew his inspiration, and not from muddy Fra Alberico or Abbate Giovacchino, from stupid visions of Saint Paul or voyages of Saint Brandan. She has written by far the best comment that has appeared in English, and we should say the best that has been done in England, were it not for her father's *Comento analitico*, for excepting which her filial piety will thank us. Students of Dante in the original will be grateful to her for many suggestive hints, and those who read him in English will find in her volume a travelling map in which the principal points and their connections are clearly set down. In what we shall say of Dante we shall endeavor only to supplement her interpretation with such side-lights as may have been furnished us by twenty years of assiduous study. Dante's thought is multiform, and, like certain street signs, once common, presents a different image according to the point of view. Let us consider briefly what was the plan of the *Divina Commedia* and Dante's aim in writing it, which, if not to justify, was at least to illustrate, for warning and example, the ways of God to man. The higher intention of the poem was to set forth the results of sin, or unwisdom, and of virtue, or wisdom, in this life, and consequently in the life to come, which is but the continuation and fulfilment of this. The scene accordingly is the spiritual world, of which we are as truly denizens now as hereafter. The poem is a diary of the human soul in its journey upwards from error through repentance to atonement with God. To

make it apprehensible by those whom it was meant to teach, nay, from its very nature as a poem, and not a treatise of abstract morality, it must set forth everything by means of sensible types and images.

> "To speak thus is adapted to your mind,
> Since only through the sense it apprehendeth
> What then it worthy makes of intellect.
> On this account the Scripture condescends
> Unto your faculties, and feet and hands
> To God attributes, and means something else." [1]

Whoever has studied mediæval art in any of its branches need not be told that Dante's age was one that demanded very palpable and even revolting types. As in the old legend, a drop of scalding sweat from the damned soul must shrivel the very skin of those for whom he wrote, to make them wince if not to turn them away from evil-doing. To consider his hell a place of physical torture is to take Circe's herd for real swine. Its mouth yawns not only under Florence, but before the feet of every man everywhere who goeth about to do evil. His hell is a condition of the soul, and he could not find images loathsome enough to express the moral deformity which is wrought by sin on its victims, or his own abhorrence of it. Its inmates meet you in the street every day.

> "Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
> In one self place; for where we are is hell,
> And where hell is there we must ever be." [2]

[1] *Paradiso*, IV. 40–45 (Longfellow's version).

[2] Marlowe's *Faustus*. "Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell." (*Paradise Lost*, IV. 75.) In the same way, *ogni dove in cielo è Paradiso*. (*Paradiso*, III. 88, 89.)

It is our own sensual eye that gives evil the appearance of good, and out of a crooked hag makes a bewitching siren. The reason enlightened by the grace of God sees it as it truly is, full of stench and corruption.[1] It is this office of reason which Dante undertakes to perform, by divine commission, in the *Inferno*. There can be no doubt that he looked upon himself as invested with the prophetic function, and the Hebrew forerunners, in whose society his soul sought consolation and sustainment, certainly set him no example of observing the conventions of good society in dealing with the enemies of God. Indeed, his notions of good society were not altogether those of this world in any generation. He would have defined it as meaning "the peers" of Philosophy, "souls free from wretched and vile delights and from vulgar habits, endowed with genius and memory."[2] Dante himself had precisely this endowment, and in a very surprising degree. His genius enabled him to see and to show what he saw to others; his memory neither forgot nor forgave. Very hateful to his fervid heart and sincere mind would have been the modern theory which deals with sin as involuntary error, and by shifting off the fault to the shoulders of Atavism or those of Society, personified for purposes of excuse, but escaping into impersonality again from the grasp of retribution, weakens that sense of personal responsibility which is the root of self-respect and the safeguard of character. Dante indeed saw clearly enough that the Divine

[1] *Purgatorio*, XIX. 7-33. [2] *Convito*, Tr. II. c. 16.

justice did at length overtake Society in the ruin of states caused by the corruption of private, and thence of civic, morals; but a personality so intense as his could not be satisfied with such a tardy and generalized penalty as this. "It is Thou," he says sternly, "who hast done this thing, and Thou, not Society, shalt be damned for it; nay, damned all the worse for this paltry subterfuge. This is not my judgment, but that of universal Nature [1] from before the beginning of the world." [2] Accordingly the highest reason, typified in his guide Virgil, rebukes him for bringing compassion to the judgments of God,[3] and again embraces him and calls the mother that bore him blessed, when he bids Filippo Argenti begone among the other dogs.[4] This latter case shocks our modern feelings the more rudely for the simple pathos with which Dante makes Argenti answer when asked who he was, "Thou seest I am one

[1] *La natura universale, cioè Dio.* (*Convito*, Tr. III. c. 4.)

[2] *Inferno*, III. 7, 8.

[3] *Inferno*, XX. 30. Mr. W. M. Rossetti strangely enough renders this verse "Who hath a passion for God's judgeship." *Compassion porta*, is the reading of the best texts, and Witte adopts it. Buti's comment is "*cioè porta pena e dolore di colui che giustamente è condannato da Dio che è sempre giusto.*" There is an analogous passage in *The Revelation of the Apostle Paul*, printed in the *Proceedings of the American Oriental Society* (vol. viii. pp. 213, 214): "And the angel answered and said, 'Wherefore dost thou weep? Why! art thou more merciful than God?' And I said, 'God forbid, O my lord; for God is good and long-suffering unto the sons of men, and he leaves every one of them to his own will, and he walks as he pleases.'" This is precisely Dante's view.

[4] *Inferno*, VIII. 40.

that weeps." It is also the one that makes most strongly for the theory of Dante's personal vindictiveness,[1] and it may count for what it is worth. We are not greatly concerned to defend him on that score, for he believed in the righteous use of anger, and that baseness was its legitimate quarry. He did not think the Tweeds and Fisks, the political wire-pullers and convention-packers, of his day merely amusing, and he certainly did think it the duty of an upright and thoroughly trained citizen to speak out severely and unmistakably. He believed firmly, almost fiercely, in a divine order of the universe, a conception whereof had been vouchsafed him, and that whatever and whoever hindered or jostled it, whether wilfully or blindly it mattered not, was to be got out of the way at all hazards; because obedience to God's law, and not making things generally comfortable, was the highest duty of man, as it was also his only way to true felicity. It has been commonly assumed that Dante was a man soured by undeserved misfortune, that he took up a wholly new outfit of political opinions with his fallen fortunes, and that his theory of life and of man's relations to it was altogether reshaped for him by the bitter musings of his exile. This would

[1] "I following her (Moral Philosophy) in the work as well as the passion, so far as I could, abominated and disparaged the errors of men, not to the infamy and shame of the erring, but of the errors." (*Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 1.) "Wherefore in my judgment as he who defames a worthy man ought to be avoided by people and not listened to, so a vile man descended of worthy ancestors ought to be hunted out by all." (*Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 29.)

be singular, to say the least, in a man who tells us that he "felt himself indeed four-square against the strokes of chance," and whose convictions were so intimate that they were not merely intellectual conclusions, but parts of his moral being. Fortunately we are called on to believe nothing of the kind. Dante himself has supplied us with hints and dates which enable us to watch the germination and trace the growth of his double theory of government, applicable to man as he is a citizen of this world, and as he hopes to become hereafter a freeman of the celestial city. It would be of little consequence to show in which of two equally selfish and short-sighted parties a man enrolled himself six hundred years ago, but it is worth something to know that a man of ambitious temper and violent passions, aspiring to office in a city of factions, could rise to a level of principle so far above them all. Dante's opinions have life in them still, because they were drawn from living sources of reflection and experience, because they were reasoned out from the astronomic laws of history and ethics, and were not weather-guesses snatched in a glance at the doubtful political sky of the hour.

> Swiftly the politic goes: is it dark? he borrows a lantern;
> Slowly the statesman and sure, guiding his feet by the stars.

It will be well, then, to clear up the chronology of Dante's thought. When his ancestor Cacciaguida prophesies to him the life which is to be his after 1300,[1] he says, speaking of his exile:—

[1] *Paradiso*, XVII. 61–69.

"And that which most shall weigh upon thy shoulders
Will be the bad and foolish company
With which into this valley thou shalt fall;
. . . . . .
Of their bestiality their own proceedings
Shall furnish proof; *so 't will be well for thee*
A party to have made thee by thyself."

Here both context and grammatical construction (infallible guides in a writer so scrupulous and exact) imply irresistibly that Dante had become a party by himself before his exile. The measure adopted by the Priors of Florence while he was one of them (with his assent and probably by his counsel), of sending to the frontier the leading men of both factions, confirms this implication. Among the persons thus removed from the opportunity of doing mischief was his dearest friend Guido Cavalcanti, to whom he had not long before addressed the *Vita Nuova*.[1] Dante evidently looked back with satisfaction on his conduct at this time, and thought it both honest and patriotic, as it certainly was disinterested. "We whose country is the world, as the ocean to the fish," he tells us, "though we drank of the Arno in infancy, and love Florence so much that, *because we loved her*, *we suffer exile unjustly*, support the shoulders

[1] It is worth mentioning that the sufferers in his *Inferno* are in like manner pretty exactly divided between the two parties. This is answer enough to the charge of partiality. He even puts persons there for whom he felt affection (as Brunetto Latini) and respect (as Farinata degli Uberti and Frederick II.). Till the French looked up their MSS., it was taken for granted that the *beccajo di Parigi* (*Purgatorio*, XX. 52) was a drop of Dante's gall. "Ce fu Huez Capez c' on apelle bouchier." *Hugues Capet*, p. 1.

of our judgment rather upon reason than the senses."[1] And again, speaking of old age, he says: "And the noble soul at this age blesses also the times past, and well may bless them, because, revolving them in memory, she recalls her righteous conduct, without which she could not enter the port to which she draws nigh, with so much riches and so great gain." This language is not that of a man who regrets some former action as mistaken, still less of one who repented it for any disastrous consequences to himself. So, in justifying a man for speaking of himself, he alleges two examples, — that of Boethius, who did so to "clear himself of the perpetual infamy of his exile"; and that of Augustine, "for, by the process of his life, which was from bad to good, from good to better, and from better to best, he gave us example and teaching."[2] After middle life, at least, Dante had that wisdom "whose use brings with it marvellous beauties, that is, contentment with every condition of time, and contempt of those things which others make their masters."[3] If Dante, moreover, wrote his treatise *De Monarchia* before 1302, and we think Witte's inference,[4] from its style and from the fact that he nowhere alludes to his banishment in it, conclusive on this point, then he was already a Ghibelline in the same larger and

[1] *De Vulgari Eloquio*, lib. i. cap. vi. Cf. *Inferno*, XV. 61–64.

[2] *Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 23. Ib. Tr. I. c. 2.

[3] *Convito*, Tr. III. c. 13.

[4] *Opp. Min.*, ed. Fraticelli, vol. ii. pp. 281 and 283. Witte is inclined to put it even earlier than 1300, and we believe he is right.

unpartisan sense which ever after distinguished him from his Italian contemporaries.

> "Let, let the Ghibellines ply their handicraft
> Beneath some other standard; for this ever
> Ill follows he who it and justice parts,"

he makes Justinian say, speaking of the Roman eagle.[1] His Ghibellinism, though undoubtedly the result of what he had seen of Italian misgovernment, embraced in its theoretical application the civilized world. His political system was one which his reason adopted, not for any temporary expediency, but because it conduced to justice, peace, and civilization, — the three conditions on which alone freedom was possible in any sense which made it worth having. Dante was intensely Italian, nay, intensely Florentine, but on all great questions he was, by the logical structure of his mind and its philosophic impartiality, incapable of intellectual provincialism.[2] If the circle of his affections, as with persistent natures commonly, was narrow, his thought swept a broad horizon from that tower of absolute self which he had reared for its speculation. Even upon the principles of poetry, mechanical and other,[3] he had reflected more profoundly than most of those who criticise his work, and it was not by chance that he discovered the secret of that magical word too few, which not only distinguishes his verse from all

[1] *Paradiso*, VI. 103–105.

[2] Some Florentines have amusingly enough doubted the genuineness of the *De Vulgari Eloquio*, because Dante therein denies the preëminence of the Tuscan dialect.

[3] See particularly the second book of the *De Vulgari Eloquio*.

other, but so strikingly from his own prose. He never took the bit of art[1] between his teeth where only poetry, and not doctrine, was concerned.

If Dante's philosophy, on the one hand, was practical, a guide for the conduct of life, it was, on the other, a much more transcendent thing, whose body was wisdom, her soul love, and her efficient cause truth. It is a practice of wisdom from the mere love of it, for so we must interpret his *amoroso uso di sapienzia*, when we remember how he has said before[2] that "the love of wisdom for its delight or profit is not true love of wisdom." And this love must embrace knowledge in all its branches, for Dante is content with nothing less than a pancratic training, and has a scorn of *dilettanti*, specialists, and quacks. "Wherefore none

[1] *Purgatorio*, XXXIII. 141. "That thing one calls beautiful whose parts answer to each other, because pleasure results from their harmony." (*Convito*, Tr. I. c. 5.) Carlyle says that "he knew too, partly, that his work was great, the greatest a man could do." He knew it fully. Telling us how Giotto's fame as a painter had eclipsed that of Cimabue, he takes an example from poetry also, and selecting two Italian poets, — one the most famous of his predecessors, the other of his contemporaries, — calmly sets himself above them both (*Purgatorio*, XI. 97-99), and gives the reason for his supremacy (*Purgatorio*, XXIV. 49-62). It is to be remembered that *Amore* in the latter passage does not mean love in the ordinary sense, but in that transcendental one set forth in the *Convito*, — that state of the soul which opens it for the descent of God's spirit, to make it over into his own image. "Therefore it is manifest that in this love the Divine virtue descends into men in the guise of an angel, . . . and it is to be noted that the descending of the virtue of one thing into another is nothing else than reducing it to its own likeness." (*Convito*, Tr. III. c. 14.)

[2] *Convito*, Tr. III. c. 11. Ib. Tr. I. c. 11.

ought to be called a true philosopher who for any delight loves any part of knowledge, as there are many who delight in composing *Canzoni*, and delight to be studious in them, and who delight to be studious in rhetoric and in music, and flee and abandon the other sciences which are all members of wisdom."[1] "Many love better to be held masters than to be so." With him wisdom is the generalization from many several knowledges of small account by themselves; it results therefore from breadth of culture, and would be impossible without it. Philosophy is a noble lady (*donna gentil*[2]), partaking of the divine essence by a kind of eternal marriage, while with other intelligences she is united in a less measure "as a mistress of whom no lover takes complete joy."[3] The eyes of this lady are her demonstrations, and her smile is her persuasion. "The eyes of wisdom are her demonstrations by which truth is beheld most certainly;

[1] *Convito*, Tr. III. c. 12–15.

[2] *Inferno*, II. 94. The *donna gentil* is Lucia, the prevenient Grace, the *light* of God which shows the right path and guides the feet in it. With Dante God is always the sun, "which leadeth others right by every road." (*Inferno*, I. 18.) "The spiritual and unintelligible Sun, which is God." (*Convito*, Tr. III. c. 12.) His light "enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world," but his dwelling is in the heavens. He who wilfully deprives himself of this light is spiritually dead in sin. So when in Mars he beholds the glorified spirits of the martyrs he exclaims, "O Helios, who so arrayest them!" (*Paradiso*, XIV. 96.) Blanc (Vocabolario, *sub voce*) rejects this interpretation. But Dante, entering the abode of the Blessed, invokes the "good Apollo," and shortly after calls him *divina virtù*. We shall have more to say of this hereafter.

[3] *Convito*, Tr. III. c. 12.

and her smile is her persuasions in which the interior light of wisdom is shown under a certain veil, and in these two is felt that highest pleasure of beatitude which is the greatest good in paradise."[1] "It is to be known that the beholding this lady was so largely ordained for us, not merely to look upon the face which she shows us, but that we may desire to attain the things which she keeps concealed. And as through her much thereof is seen by reason, so by her we believe that every miracle may have its reason in a higher intellect, and consequently may be. Whence our good faith has its origin, whence comes the hope of those unseen things which we desire, and through that the operation of charity, by the which three virtues we rise to philosophize in that celestial Athens where the Stoics, Peripatetics, and Epicureans through the art of eternal truth accordingly concur in one will."[2]

As to the double scope of Dante's philosophy we will cite a passage from the *Convito*, all the more to our purpose as it will illustrate his own method

[1] *Convito*, Tr. III. c. 15. Recalling how the eyes of Beatrice lift her servant through the heavenly spheres, and that smile of hers so often dwelt on with rapture, we see how Dante was in the habit of commenting and illustrating his own works. We must remember always that with him the allegorical exposition is the true one (*Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 1), the allegory being a truth which is hidden under a beautiful falsehood (*Convito*, Tr. II. c. 1), and that Dante thought his poems without this exposition "under some shade of obscurity, so that to many their beauty was more grateful than their goodness" (*Convito*, Tr. I. c. 1), "because the goodness is in the meaning, and the beauty in the ornament of the words" (*Convito*, Tr. II. c. 12).

[2] *Convito*, Tr. III. c. 14.

of allegorizing. "Verily the use of our mind is double, that is, practical and speculative, the one and the other most delightful, although that of contemplation be the more so. That of the practical is for us to act virtuously, that is, honorably, with prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. [These are the four stars seen by Dante, *Purgatorio*, I. 22, 27.] That of the speculative is not to act for ourselves, but to consider the works of God and nature. . . . Verily of these uses one is more full of beatitude than the other, as it is the speculative, which without any admixture is the use of our noblest part. . . . And this part in this life cannot have its use perfectly, which is to see God, except inasmuch as the intellect considers him and beholds him through his effects. And that we should seek this beatitude as the highest, and not the other, the Gospel of Mark teaches us if we will look well. Mark says that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Mary Salome went to find the Saviour at the tomb and found him not, but found a youth clad in white who said to them, 'Ye seek the Saviour, and I say unto you that he is not here; and yet fear ye not, but go and say unto his disciples and Peter that he will go before them into Galilee, and there ye shall see him even as he told you.' By these three women may be understood the three sects of the active life, that is, the Epicureans, the Stoics, and the Peripatetics, who go to the tomb, that is, to the present life, which is a receptacle of things corruptible, and seek the Saviour, that is, beatitude, and find him not,

but they find a youth in white raiment, who, according to the testimony of Matthew and the rest, was an angel of God. This angel is that nobleness of ours which comes from God, as hath been said, which speaks in our reason and says to each of these sects, that is, to whoever goes seeking beatitude in this life, that it is not here, but go and say to the disciples and to Peter, that is, to those who go seeking it and those who are gone astray (like Peter who had denied), that it will go before them into Galilee, that is, into speculation. Galilee is as much as to say Whiteness. Whiteness is a body full of corporeal light more than any other, and so contemplation is fuller of spiritual light than anything else here below. And he says, 'it will go before,' and does not say, 'it will be with you,' to give us to understand that God always goes before our contemplation, nor can we ever overtake here Him who is our supreme beatitude. And it is said, 'There ye shall see him as he told you,' that is, here ye shall have of his sweetness, that is, felicity, as is promised you here, that is, as it is ordained that ye can have. And thus it appears that we find our beatitude, this felicity of which we are speaking, first imperfect in the active life, that is, in the operations of the moral virtues, and afterwards wellnigh perfect in the operation of the intellectual ones, the which two operations are speedy and most direct ways to lead to the supreme beatitude, the which cannot be had here, as appears by what has been said." [1]

[1] *Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 22.

At first sight there may seem to be some want of agreement in what Dante says here of the soul's incapacity of the vision of God in this life with the triumphant conclusion of his own poem. But here as elsewhere Dante must be completed and explained by himself. "We must know that everything most greatly desires its own perfection, and in that its every desire is appeased, and by that everything is desired. [That is, the one is drawn toward, the other draws.] And this is that desire which makes every delight maimed, for no delight is so great in this life that it can take away from the soul this thirst so that desire remain not in the thought."[1] "And since it is most natural to wish to be in God, the human soul naturally wills it with all longing. And since its being depends on God and is preserved thereby, it naturally desires and wills to be united with God in order to fortify its being. And since in the goodnesses of human nature is shown some reason for those of the Divine, it follows that the human soul unites itself in a spiritual way with those so much the more strongly and quickly as they appear more perfect, and this appearance happens according as the knowledge of the soul is clear or impeded. And this union is what we call Love, whereby may be known what is within the soul, seeing those it outwardly loves. . . . And the human soul which is ennobled with the ultimate potency, that is, reason, participates in the Divine nature after the manner of an eternal Intelligence, because the soul is so ennobled and

[1] *Convito*, Tr. III. c. 6.

denuded of matter in that sovran potency that the Divine light shines in it as in an angel."[1] This union with God may therefore take place before the warfare of life is over, but is only possible for souls *perfettamente naturati*, perfectly endowed by nature.[2] This depends on the virtue of the generating soul and the concordant influence of the planets. "And if it happen that through the purity of the recipient soul, the intellectual virtue be well abstracted and absolved from every corporeal shadow, the Divine bounty is multiplied in it as in a thing sufficient to receive the same."[3] "And there are some who believe that if all the aforesaid virtues [powers] should unite for the production of a soul in their best disposition, so much of the Deity would descend into it that it would be almost another incarnate God."[4] Did Dante believe himself to be one of these? He certainly gives us reason to think so. He was born under fortunate stars, as he twice tells us,[5] and he puts the middle of his own life at the thirty-fifth year, which is the period he assigns for it in the diviner sort of men.[6]

The stages of Dante's intellectual and moral

[1] *Convito*, Tr. III. c. 2. By *potenzia* and *potenza* Dante means the faculty of receiving influences or impressions. (*Paradiso*, XIII. 61; XXIX. 34.) Reason is the "sovran potency" because it makes us capable of God.

[2] "O thou *well-born*, unto whom Grace concedes
To see the thrones of the Eternal triumph,
Or ever yet the warfare be abandoned."
(*Paradiso*, V. 115–118.)

[3] *Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 21.

[4] *Convito*, Tr. III. c. 7.

[5] *Inferno*, X. 55, 56; *Paradiso*, XXII. 112–117.

[6] *Convito*, Tr. I. c. 23 (cf. *Inferno*, I. IV.).

growth may, we think, be reckoned with some approach to exactness from data supplied by himself. In the poems of the *Vita Nuova*, Beatrice, until her death, was to him simply a poetical ideal, a type of abstract beauty, chosen according to the fashion of the day after the manner of the Provençal poets, but in a less carnal sense than theirs. "And by the fourth nature of animals, that is, the sensitive, man has another love whereby he loves according to sensible appearance, even as a beast. . . . And by the fifth and final nature, that is, the truly human, or, to speak better, angelic, that is, rational, man has a love for truth and virtue. . . . Wherefore, since this nature is called *mind*, I said that love discoursed in my mind to make it understood that this love was that which is born in the noblest of natures, that is, [the love] of truth and virtue, and *to shut out every false opinion by which it might be suspected that my love was for the delight of sense.*"[1] This is a very weighty affirmation, made, as it is, so deliberately by a man of Dante's veracity, who would and did speak truth at every hazard. Let us dismiss at once and forever all the idle tales of Dante's amours, of la Montanina, Gentucca, Pietra, Lisetta, and the rest, to that outer darkness of impure thoughts *là onde la stoltezza dipartille.*[2] We think Miss Ros-

[1] *Convito*, Tr. III. c. 3; *Paradiso*, XVIII. 108–130.

[2] See an excellent discussion and elucidation of this matter by Witte, who so highly deserves the gratitude of all students of Dante, in *Dante Alighieri's Lyrische Gedichte*, Theil II. pp. 48–57. It was kindly old Boccaccio, who, without thinking any harm, first set this nonsense a-going. His *Life of Dante* is mainly

setti a little hasty in allowing that in the years which immediately followed Beatrice's death Dante gave himself up "more or less to sensual gratification and earthly aim." The earthly aim we in a certain sense admit; the sensual gratification we reject as utterly inconsistent, not only with Dante's principles, but with his character and indefatigable industry. Miss Rossetti illustrates her position by a subtle remark on "the lulling spell of an intellectual and sensitive delight in good running parallel with a voluntary and actual indulgence in evil." The dead Beatrice beckoned him toward the life of contemplation, and it was precisely during this period that he attempted to find happiness

a rhetorical exercise. After making Dante's marriage an excuse for revamping all the old slanders against matrimony, he adds gravely, "Certainly I do not affirm these things to have happened to Dante, for I do not know it, though it be true that (whether things like these or others were the cause of it), once parted from her, he would never come where she was nor suffer her to come where he was, for all that she was the mother of several children by him." That he did not come to her is not wonderful, for he would have been burned alive if he had. Dante could not send for her because he was a homeless wanderer. She remained in Florence with her children because she had powerful relations and perhaps property there. It is plain, also, that what Boccaccio says of Dante's *lussuria* had no better foundation. It gave him a chance to turn a period. He gives no particulars, and his general statement is simply incredible. Lionardo Bruni and Vellutello long ago pointed out the trifling and fictitious character of this *Life*. Those familiar with Dante's allegorical diction will not lay much stress on the literal meaning of *pargoletta* in *Purgatorio*, XXXI. 59. Gentucca, of course, was a real person, one of those who had shown hospitality to the exile. Dante remembers them all somewhere, for gratitude (which is quite as rare as genius) was one of the virtues of his unforgetting nature. Boccaccio's *Comment* is later and far more valuable than the *Life*.

in the life of action. "Verily it is to be known that we may in this life have two felicities, following two ways, good and best, which lead us thither. The one is the active, the other the contemplative life, the which (though by the active we may attain, as has been said, unto good felicity) leads us to the best felicity and blessedness."[1] "The life of my heart, that is, of my inward self, was wont to be a sweet thought which went many times to the feet of God, that is to say, in thought I contemplated the kingdom of the Blessed. And I tell the final cause why I mounted thither in thought when I say, 'Where it [the sweet thought] beheld a lady in glory,' that I might make it understood that I was and am certain, by *her gracious revelation, that she was in heaven*, [not on earth, as I had vainly imagined,] whither I went in thought, so often as was possible to me, as it were rapt."[2] This passage exactly answers to another in *Purgatorio*, XXX. 109–138:—

"Not only by the work of those great wheels
That destine every seed unto some end,
According as the stars are in conjunction,
But by the largess of celestial graces,
. . . . . .
Such had this man become in his New Life
Potentially, that every righteous habit
Would have made admirable proof in him;
. . . . . .
Some time did I sustain him with my look (*volto*);
Revealing unto him my youthful eyes,
I led him with me turned in the right way.

[1] *Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 17; *Purgatorio*, XXVII. 100–108.
[2] *Convito*, Tr. II. c. 8.

As soon as ever of my second age
I was upon the threshold and changed life,
Himself from me he took and gave to others.
When from the flesh to spirit I ascended,
And beauty and virtue were in me increased,
I was to him less dear and less delightful;
And into ways untrue he turned his steps,
Pursuing the false images of good,
That never any promises fulfil [1]
Nor prayer for inspiration me availed,[2]
By means of which in dreams and otherwise
I called him back, so little did he heed them.
So low he fell, that all appliances
For his salvation were already short,
Save showing him the people of perdition."

Now Dante himself, we think, gives us the clue, by following which we may reconcile the contradiction, what Miss Rossetti calls "the astounding discrepancy," between the Lady of the *Vita Nuova* who made him unfaithful to Beatrice, and the same Lady in the *Convito*, who in attributes is identical with Beatrice herself. We must remember that the prose part of the *Convito*, which is a comment on the *Canzoni*, was written after the *Canzoni* themselves. How long after we cannot say with certainty, but it was plainly composed at intervals, a part of it probably after Dante had entered upon old age (which began, as he tells us, with the forty-fifth year), consequently after 1310. Dante had

[1] That is, *wholly* fulfil, *rendono intera.*

[2] We should prefer here,

"Nor inspirations *won by prayer* availed,"

as better expressing *Nè l' impetrare spirazion.* Mr Longfellow's translation is so admirable for its exactness as well as its beauty that it may be thankful for the minutest criticism, such only being possible.

then written a considerable part of the *Divina Commedia*, in which Beatrice was to go through her final and most ethereal transformation in his mind and memory. We say in his memory, for such idealizations have a very subtle retrospective action, and the new condition of feeling or thought is uneasy till it has half unconsciously brought into harmony whatever is inconsistent with it in the past. The inward life unwillingly admits any break in its continuity, and nothing is more common than to hear a man, in venting an opinion taken up a week ago, say with perfect sincerity, "I have always thought so and so." Whatever belief occupies the whole mind soon produces the impression on us of having long had possession of it, and one mode of consciousness blends so insensibly with another that it is impossible to mark by an exact line where one begins and the other ends. Dante in his exposition of the *Canzoni* must have been subject to this subtlest and most deceitful of influences. He would try to reconcile so far as he conscientiously could his present with his past. This he could do by means of the allegorical interpretation. "For it would be a great shame to him," he says in the *Vita Nuova*, "who should poetize something under the vesture of some figure or rhetorical color, and afterwards, when asked, could not strip his words of that vesture in such wise that they should have a true meaning." Now in the literal exposition of the *Canzone* beginning, "Voi che intendendo il terzo ciel movete," [1] he

[1] Which he cites in the *Paradiso*, VIII. 37.

tells us that the *grandezza* of the *Donna Gentil* was "temporal greatness" (one certainly of the felicities attainable by way of the *vita attiva*), and immediately after gives us a hint by which we may comprehend why a proud[1] man might covet it. "How much wisdom and how great a persistence in virtue (*abito virtuoso*) are hidden for want of this lustre!"[2] When Dante reaches the Terrestrial Paradise[3] which is the highest felicity of this world, and therefore the consummation of the Active Life, he is welcomed by a Lady who is its symbol,

"Who went along
Singing and culling floweret after floweret,"

and warming herself in the rays of Love, or "actual speculation," that is, "where love makes its peace felt."[4] That she was the symbol of this is evident from the previous dream of Dante,[5] in which he sees Leah, the universally accepted type of it,

"Walking in a meadow,
Gathering flowers; and singing she was saying,
'Know whosoever may my name demand
That I am Leah, and go moving round
My beauteous hands to make myself a garland,'"

that is to say, of good works. She, having "washed him thoroughly from sin,"[6]

[1] Dante confesses his guiltiness of the sin of pride, which (as appears by the examples he gives of it) included ambition, in *Purgatorio*, XIII. 136, 137.

[2] *Convito*, Tr. II. c. 11. [3] *Purgatorio*, XXVIII.

[4] *Purgatorio*, XXVIII. 40–44; *Convito*, Tr. III. c. 13.

[5] *Purgatorio*, XXVII. 94–105.

[6] Psalm li. 2. "And therefore I say that her [Philosophy's]

"All dripping brought
Into the dance of the four beautiful," [1]

who are the intellectual virtues Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude, the four stars, guides of the Practical Life, which he had seen when he came out of the Hell where he had beheld the results of sin, and arrived at the foot of the Mount of Purification. That these were the special virtues of practical goodness Dante had already told us in a passage before quoted from the *Convito*.[2] That this was Dante's meaning is confirmed by what Beatrice says to him,[3]

"Short while shalt thou be here a forester (*silvano*)
And thou shalt be with me forevermore
A citizen of that Rome where Christ is Roman";

for by a "forest" he always means the world of life and action.[4] At the time when Dante was writing the *Canzoni* on which the *Convito* was a comment, he believed science to be the "ultimate perfection itself, and not the way to it," [5] but before the *Convito* was composed he had become aware of a higher and purer light, an inward light, in that Beatrice, already clarified wellnigh to a mere image of the mind, "who lives in heaven with the angels, and on earth with my soul." [6]

beauty, that is, morality, rains flames of fire, that is, a righteous appetite which is generated in the love of moral doctrine, the which appetite removes us from the natural as well as other vices." (*Convito*, Tr. III. c. 15.)

[1] *Purgatorio*, XXXI. 103, 104. [2] Tr. IV. c. 22.

[3] *Purgatorio*, XXXII. 100–102.

[4] Such is the *selva oscura* (*Inferno*, I. 2), such the *selva erronea di questa vita* (*Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 24).

[5] *Convito*, Tr. I. c. 13. [6] *Convito*, Tr. II. c. 2.

So spiritually does Dante always present Beatrice to us, even where most corporeal, as in the *Vita Nuova*, that many, like Biscione and Rossetti, have doubted her real existence. But surely we must consent to believe that she who speaks of

> "The fair limbs wherein
> I was enclosed, which scattered are in earth,"

was once a creature of flesh and blood, —

> "A creature not too bright and good
> For human nature's daily food."

When she died, Dante's grief, like that of Constance, filled her room up with something fairer than the reality had ever been. There is no idealizer like unavailing regret, all the more if it be a regret of fancy as much as of real feeling. She early began to undergo that change into something rich and strange in the sea [1] of his mind which so completely supernaturalized her at last. It is not impossible, we think, to follow the process of transformation. During the period of the *Convito Canzoni*, when he had so given himself to study that to his weakened eyes "the stars were shadowed with a white blur," [2] this star of his imagination was eclipsed for a time with the rest. As his love had never been of the senses (which is bestial [3]), so his sorrow was all the more ready to be irradiated with celestial light, and to assume her to be the transmitter of it who had first awakened in him the nobler impulses of his nature, —

[1] *Mar di tutto il senno*, he calls Virgil (*Inferno*, VIII. 7). Those familiar with his own works will think the phrase singularly applicable to himself.

[2] *Convito*, Tr. III. c. 9.

[3] *Convito*, Tr. III. c. 3.

("Such had this man become in his New Life
Potentially,")

and given him the first hints of a higher, nay, of the highest good. With that turn for double meaning and abstraction which was so strong in him, her very name helped him to allegorize her into one who makes blessed (*beat*), and thence the step was a short one to personify in her that Theosophy which enables man to see God and to be mystically united with him even in the flesh. Already, in the *Vita Nuova*,[1] she appears to him as afterwards in the Terrestrial Paradise, clad in that color of flame which belongs to the seraphim who contemplate God in himself, simply, and not in his relation to the Son or the Holy Spirit.[2] When misfortune came upon him, when his schemes of worldly activity failed, and science was helpless to console, as it had never been able wholly to satisfy, she already rose before him as the lost ideal of his youth, reproaching him with his desertion of purely spiritual aims. It is, perhaps, in allusion to this that he fixes the date of her death with such minute precision on the 9th June, 1390, most probably his own twenty-fifth birthday, on which he passed the boundary of adolescence.[3]

That there should seem to be a discrepancy between the Lady of the *Vita Nuova* and her of the

[1] *Vita Nuova*, XI. [2] *Vita Nuova*, Tr. II. c. 6.

[3] *Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 24. The date of Dante's birth is uncertain, but the period he assigns for it (*Paradiso*, XXII. 112–117) extends from the middle of May to the middle of June. If we understand Buti's astrological comment, the day should fall in June rather than May.

Convito, Dante himself was already aware when writing the former and commenting it. Explaining the sonnet beginning *Gentil pensier*, he says, "In this sonnet I make two parts of myself according as my thoughts were divided in two. The one part I call *heart*, that is, the appetite, the other *soul*, that is, reason. . . . It is true that in the preceding sonnet I take side with the heart against the eyes [which were weeping for the lost Beatrice], and that appears contrary to what I say in the present one; and therefore I say that in that sonnet also I mean by my *heart* the appetite, because my desire to remember me of my most gentle Lady was still greater than to behold this one, albeit I had already some appetite for her, but slight as should seem: whence it appears that the one saying is not contrary to the other."[1] When, therefore, Dante speaks of the love of this Lady as the "adversary of *Reason*," he uses the word in its highest sense, not as understanding (*Intellectus*), but as synonymous with *soul*. Already, when the latter part of the *Vita Nuova*, nay, perhaps the whole of the explanatory portion of it, was written, the plan of the *Commedia* was complete, a poem the higher aim of which was to keep the soul alive both in this world and for the next. As Dante tells us, the contradiction in his mind was, though he did not become aware of it till afterwards, more apparent than real.

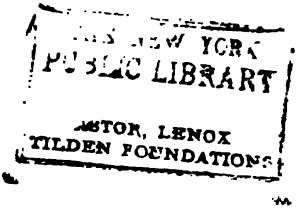
[1] *Vita Nuova*, XXXIX. Compare for a different view, *The New Life of Dante*, an Essay with Translations, by C. E. Norton, pp. 92 et seq.

He sought consolation in study, and, failing to find it in Learning (*scienza*), he was led to seek it in Wisdom (*sapienza*), which is the love of God and the knowledge of him.[1] He had sought happiness through the understanding; he was to find it through intuition. The lady Philosophy (according as she is moral or intellectual) includes both. Her gradual transfiguration is exemplified in passages already quoted. The active life leads indirectly by a knowledge of its failures and sins (*Inferno*), or directly by a righteous employment of it

[1] There is a passage in the *Convito* (Tr. III. c. 15) in which Dante seems clearly to make the distinction asserted above, "And therefore the desire of man is limited in this life to that *knowledge* (*scienzia*) which may here be had, and passes not save by error that point which is beyond our natural understanding. And so is limited and measured in the angelic nature the amount of that *wisdom* which the nature of each is capable of receiving." Man is, according to Dante, superior to the angels in this, that he is capable both of reason and contemplation, while they are confined to the latter. That Beatrice's reproaches refer to no human *pargoletta*, the context shows, where Dante asks,

> "But wherefore so beyond my power of sight
> Soars your desirable discourse, that aye
> The more I strive, so much the more I lose it?
> 'That thou mayst recognize,' she said, 'the school
> Which thou hast followed, and mayst see how far
> Its doctrine follows after my discourse,
> And mayst behold your path from the divine
> Distant as far as separated is
> From earth the heaven that highest hastens on.'"
>
> *Purgatorio*, XXXIII. 82-90.

The *pargoletta* in its ordinary sense was necessary to the literal and human meaning, but it is shockingly discordant with that non-natural interpretation which, according to Dante's repeated statement, lays open the true and divine meaning.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(*Purgatorio*), to the same end. The use of the sciences is to induce in us the ultimate perfection, that of speculating upon truth; the use of the highest of them, theology, the contemplation of God.[1] To this they all lead up. In one of those curious chapters of the *Convito*,[2] where he points out the analogy between the sciences and the heavens, Dante tells us that he compares moral philosophy with the crystalline heaven or *Primum Mobile*, because it communicates life and gives motion to all the others below it. But what gives motion to the crystalline heaven (moral philosophy) itself? "The most fervent appetite which it has in each of its parts to be conjoined with each part of that most divine quiet heaven" (Theology).[3] Theology, the divine science, corresponds with the Empyrean, "because of its peace, the which, through the most excellent certainty of its subject, which is God, suffers no strife of opinions or sophistic arguments."[4] No one of the heavens is at rest but this, and in none of the inferior sciences can we find repose, though he likens physics to the heaven of the fixed stars, in whose name is a suggestion of the certitude to be arrived at in things demonstrable. Dante had this comparison in mind, it may be inferred, when he said,

[1] "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." (Romans viii. 8, 9.)

[2] *Convito*, Tr. II. c. 14, 15.

[3] *Convito*, Tr. II. c. 4. Compare *Paradiso*, I. 76, 77.

[4] "Vain babblings and oppositions of science falsely so called." (1 Tim. vi. 20.)

"Well I perceive that never sated is
Our intellect unless the Truth illume it
Beyond which nothing true[1] expands itself.
It rests therein as wild beast in his lair,
When it attains it; and it can attain it;
If not, then each desire would frustrate be.
Therefore springs up, in fashion of a shoot,
Doubt at the foot of truth; and this is nature,
Which to the top from height to height impels us."[2]

The contradiction, as it seems to us, resolves itself into an essential, easily apprehensible, if mystical, unity. Dante at first gave himself to the study of the sciences (after he had lost the simple, unquestioning faith of youth) as the means of arriving at certainty. From the root of every truth to which he attained sprang this sucker (*rampollo*) of doubt, drawing out of it the very sap of its life. In this way was Philosophy truly an adversary of his soul, and the reason of his remorse for fruitless studies which drew him away from the one that alone was and could be fruitful is obvious enough. But by and by out of the very doubt came the sweetness[3] of a higher and truer insight. He became aware that there were "things in heaven and earth undreamt of in your philosophy," as another doubter said, who had just finished *his* studies, but could not find his way out of the scepticism they engendered as Dante did.

"Insane is he who hopeth that our reason
Can traverse the illimitable way,
Which the one Substance in three Persons follows!

[1] That is, no partial truth. [2] *Paradiso*, IV. 124–132.

[3] "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." (Judges xiv. 14.)

Mortals, remain contented at the *Quia;*
For if ye had been able to see all,
No need there were [had been] for Mary to give birth.
And ye have seen desiring without fruit
Those whose desire would have been quieted,
Which evermore is given them for a grief.
I speak of Aristotle and of Plato
And others many."[1]

Whether at the time when the poems of the *Vita Nuova* were written the Lady who withdrew him for a while from Beatrice was (which we doubt) a person of flesh and blood or not, she was no

[1] *Purgatorio*, III. 34–44. The allusions in this passage are all to sayings of Saint Paul, of whom Dante was plainly a loving reader. "Remain contented at the *Quia*," that is, be satisfied with knowing *that* things are, without inquiring too nicely *how* or *why*. "Being justified by faith we have peace with God" (Rom. v. 1). *Infinita via:* "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. xi. 33.) *Aristotle and Plato:* "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness. . . . For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that *they are without excuse*. Because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. i. 18–21). He refers to the Greeks. The Epistle to the Romans, by the way, would naturally be Dante's favorite. As Saint Paul made the Law, so he would make Science, "our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. iii. 24). He puts Aristotle and Plato in his Inferno, because they did not "adore God duly" (*Inferno*, IV. 38), that is, they "held the truth in unrighteousness." Yet he calls Aristotle "the master and guide of human reason" (*Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 6), and Plato "a most excellent man" (*Convito*, Tr. II. c. 5). Plato and Aristotle, like all Dante's figures, are types. We must disengage our thought from the individual, and fix it on the genus.

longer so when the prose narrative was composed. Any one familiar with Dante's double meanings will hardly question that by putting her at a window, which is a place to look out of, he intended to imply that she personified Speculation, a word which he uses with a wide range of meaning, sometimes as *looking for*, sometimes as *seeing* (like Shakespeare's

"There is no *speculation* in those eyes"),

sometimes as *intuition*, or the beholding all things in God, who is the cause of all. This is so obvious, and the image in this sense so familiar, that we are surprised it should have been hitherto unremarked. It is plain that, even when the *Vita Nuova* was written, the Lady was already Philosophy, but philosophy applied to a lower range of thought, not yet ascended from flesh to spirit. The Lady who seduced him was the science which looks for truth in second causes, or even in effects, instead of seeking it, where alone it can be found, in the First Cause; she was the Philosophy which looks for happiness in the visible world (of shadows), and not in the spiritual (and therefore substantial) world. The guerdon of his search was doubt. But Dante, as we have seen, made his very doubts help him upward toward certainty; each became a round in the ladder by which he climbed to clearer and clearer vision till the end.[1] Philosophy had

[1] It is to be remembered that Dante has typified the same thing when he describes how Reason (Virgil) first carries him down by clinging to the fell of Satan, and then in the same way upwards again *a riveder le stelle*. Satan is the symbol of materialism, fixed at the point

made him forget Beatrice; it was Philosophy who was to bring him back to her again, washed clean in that very stream of forgetfulness that had made an impassable barrier between them.[1] Dante had known how to find in her the gift of Achilles's lance,

> "Which used to be the cause
> First of a sad and then a gracious boon."[2]

There is another possible, and even probable, theory which would reconcile the Beatrice of the *Purgatorio* with her of the *Vita Nuova*. Suppose that even in the latter she signified Theology, or at least some influence that turned his thoughts to God? Pietro di Dante, commenting the *pargoletta* passage in the *Purgatorio*, says expressly that the poet had at one time given himself to the study of theology and deserted it for poesy and other mundane sciences. This must refer to a period begin-

"To which things heavy draw from every side";

as God is Light and Warmth, so is he "cold obstruction"; the very effort which he makes to rise by the motion of his wings begets the chilly blast that freezes him more immovably in his place of doom. The danger of all science save the highest (theology) was that it led to materialism. There appears to have been a great deal of it in Florence in the time of Dante. Its followers called themselves Epicureans, and burn in living tombs (*Inferno*, X.). Dante held them in special horror. "Of all bestialities that is the most foolish and vile and hurtful which believes there is no other life after this." "And I so believe, so affirm, and so am certain that we pass to another better life after this" (*Convito*, Tr. II. c. 9). It is a fine divination of Carlyle from the *Non han speranza di morte* that "one day it had risen sternly benign in the scathed heart of Dante that he, wretched, never resting, worn as he was, would [should] full surely *die*."

[1] *Purgatorio*, XXXI. 103. [2] *Inferno*, XXXI. 5, 6.

ning before 1290. Again, there is an early tradition that Dante in his youth had been a novice in a Franciscan convent, but never took the vows. Buti affirms this expressly in his comment on *Inferno*, XVI. 106–123. It is perhaps slightly confirmed by what Dante says in the *Convito*,[1] that "one can not ouly turn to Religion by making himself like in habit and life to St. Benedict, St. Augustine, St. Francis, and St. Dominic, but likewise one may turn to good and true religion in a state of matrimony, for God wills no religion in us but of the heart." If he had ever thought of taking monastic vows, his marriage would have cut short any such intention. If he ever wished to wed the real Beatrice Portinari, and was disappointed, might not this be the time when his thoughts took that direction? If so, the impulse came indirectly, at least, from her.

We have admitted that Beatrice Portinari was a real creature,

> "Col sangue suo e con le sue giunture";

but *how* real she was, and whether as real to the poet's memory as to his imagination, may fairly be questioned. She shifts, as the controlling emotion or the poetic fitness of the moment dictates, from a woman loved and lost to a gracious exhalation of all that is fairest in womanhood or most divine in the soul of man, and ere the eye has defined the new image it has become the old one again, or another mingled of both.

[1] Tr. IV. c. 28.

"Nor one nor other seemed now what he was;
E'en as proceedeth on before the flame
Upward along the paper a brown color,
Which is not black as yet, and the white dies."[1]

As the mystic Griffin in the eyes of Beatrice (her demonstrations), so she in his own,

"Now with the one, now with the other nature;
Think, Reader, if within myself I marvelled
When I beheld the thing itself stand still
And in its image it transformed itself."[2]

At the very moment when she had undergone her most sublimated allegorical evaporation, his instinct as poet, which never failed him, realized her into woman again in those scenes of almost unapproached pathos which make the climax of his *Purgatorio*. The verses tremble with feeling and shine with tears.[3] Beatrice recalls her own beauty

[1] *Inferno*, XXV. 64–67. [2] *Purgatorio*, XXXI. 123–126.

[3] Spenser, who had, like Dante, a Platonizing side, and who was probably the first English poet since Chaucer that had read the *Commedia*, has imitated the pictorial part of these passages in the *Faerie Queene* (B. VI. c. 10). He has turned it into a compliment, and a very beautiful one, to a living mistress. It is instructive to compare the effect of his purely sensuous verses with that of Dante's, which have such a wonderful reach behind them. They are singularly pleasing, but they do not stay by us as those of his model had done by him. Spenser was, as Milton called him, a "sage and serious poet"; he would be the last to take offence if we draw from him a moral not without its use now that Priapus is trying to persuade us that pose and drapery will make him as good as Urania. Better far the naked nastiness; the more covert the indecency, the more it shocks. Poor old god of gardens! Innocent as a clownish symbol, he is simply disgusting as an ideal of art. In the last century, they set him up in Germany and in France as befitting an era of enlightenment, the light of which came too manifestly from the wrong quarter to be long endurable.

with a pride as natural as that of Fair Annie in the old ballad, and compares herself as advantageously with the "brown, brown bride" who had supplanted her. If this be a ghost, we do not need be told that she is a woman still.[1] We must remember, however, that Beatrice had to be real that she might be interesting, to be beautiful that her goodness might be persuasive, nay, to be beautiful at any rate, because beauty has also something in

[1] This touch of nature recalls another. The Italians claim humor for Dante. We have never been able to find it, unless it be in that passage (*Inferno*, XV. 119) where Brunetto Latini lingers under the burning shower to recommend his Tesoro to his former pupil. There is a comical touch of nature in an author's solicitude for his little work, not, as in Fielding's case, after *its*, but his own damnation. We are not sure, but we fancy we catch the momentary flicker of a smile across those serious eyes of Dante's. There is something like humor in the opening verses of the XVI. *Paradiso*, where Dante tells us how even in heaven he could not help glorying in being gently born, — he who had devoted a Canzone and a book of the *Convito* to proving that nobility consisted wholly in virtue. But there is, after all, something touchingly natural in the feeling. Dante, unjustly robbed of his property, and with it of the independence so dear to him, seeing

> "Needy nothings trimmed in jollity,
> And captive Good attending Captain Ill,"

would naturally fall back on a distinction which money could neither buy nor replace. There is a curious passage in the *Convito* which shows how bitterly he resented his undeserved poverty. He tells us that buried treasure commonly revealed itself to the bad rather than the good. "Verily I saw the place on the flanks of a mountain in Tuscany called Falterona, where the basest peasant of the whole countryside digging found there more than a bushel of pieces of the finest silver, which perhaps had awaited him more than a thousand years." (Tr. IV. c. 11.) One can see the grimness of his face as he looked and thought, "how salt a savor hath the bread of others!"

it of divine. Dante has told, in a passage already quoted, that he would rather his readers should find his doctrine sweet than his verses, but he had his relentings from this Stoicism.

> "Canzone, I believe those will be rare
> Who of thine inner sense can master all,
> Such toil it costs thy native tongue to learn;
> Wherefore, if ever it perchance befall
> That thou in presence of such men shouldst fare
> As seem not skilled thy meaning to discern,
> I pray thee then thy grief to comfort turn,
> Saying to them, 'O thou my new delight,
> Take heed at least how fair I am to sight.'"[1]

We believe all Dante's other Ladies to have been as purely imaginary as the Dulcinea of Don Quixote, useful only as *motives*, but a real Beatrice is as essential to the human sympathies of the *Divina Commedia* as her glorified Idea to its allegorical teaching, and this Dante understood perfectly well.[2] Take *her* out of the poem, and the heart of it goes with her; take out her ideal, and it is emptied of its soul. She is the menstruum in which letter and spirit dissolve and mingle into unity. Those who doubt her existence must find Dante's graceful sonnet[3] to Guido Cavalcanti as provoking as Sancho's story of his having seen Dulcinea winnowing wheat was to his master, "so alien is it from all

[1] L'Envoi of Canzone XIV. of the *Canzoniere*, I. of the *Convito*. Dante cites the first verse of this Canzone, *Paradiso*, VIII. 37.

[2] How Dante himself could allegorize even historical personages may be seen in a curious passage of the *Convito* (Tr. IV. c. 28), where, commenting on a passage of Lucan, he treats Martia and Cato as mere figures of speech.

[3] II. of the *Canzoniere*. See Fraticelli's preface.

that which eminent persons, who are constituted and preserved for other exercises and entertainments, do and ought to do."[1] But we should always remember in reading Dante that with him the allegorical interpretation is the true one (*verace sposizione*), and that he represents himself (and that at a time when he was known to the world only by his minor poems) as having made righteousness (*rettitudine*, in other words, moral philosophy) the subject of his verse.[2] Love with him seems first to have meant the love of truth and the search after it (*speculazione*), and afterwards the contemplation of it in its infinite source (*speculazione* in its higher and mystical sense.) This is the divine love "which where it shines darkens and wellnigh extinguishes all other loves."[3] Wisdom

[1] *Don Quixote*, P. II. c. viii.

[2] *De Vulgari Eloquio*, l. ii. c. 2. He says the same of Giraud de Borneil, many of whose poems are moral and even devotional. See, particularly, "Al honor Dieu torn en mon chan" (Raynouard, *Lex Rom.* I. 388), "Ben es dregz pos en aital port" (Ib. 393), "Jois sia comensamens" (Ib. 395), and "Be veg e conosc e say" (Ib. 398). Another of his poems ("Ar ai grant joy," Raynouard, *Choix*, III. 304), may *possibly* be a mystical profession of love for the Blessed Virgin, for whom, as Dante tells us, Beatrice had a special devotion.

[3] *Convito*, Tr. III. c. 14. In the same chapter is perhaps an explanation of the two rather difficult verses which follow that in which the *verace speglio* is spoken of (*Paradiso*, XXVI. 107, 108).

"Che fa di sè pareglie l' altre cose
E nulla face lui di sè pareglio."

Buti's comment is, "that is, makes of itself a receptacle to other things, that is, to all things that exist, which are all seen in it." Dante says (*ubi supra*), "The descending of the virtue of one thing into another is a reducing that other into a likeness of itself.

is the object of it, and the end of wisdom to contemplate God the true mirror (*verace speglio, speculum*), wherein all things are seen as they truly are. Nay, she herself "is the brightness of the eternal light, the unspotted mirror of the majesty of God." [1]

. . . Whence we see that the sun sending his ray down hitherward reduces things to a likeness with his light in so far as they are able by their disposition to receive light from his power. So I say that God reduces this love to a likeness with himself as much as it is possible for it to be like him." In Provençal *pareilh* means *like*, and Dante may have formed his word from it. But the four earliest printed texts read: —

"Che fa di sè pareglio all' altre cose."

Accordingly we are inclined to think that the next verse should be corrected thus: —

"E nulla face a lui di sè pareglio."

We would form *pareglio* from *parere* (a something in which things *appear*), as *miraglio* from *mirare* (a something in which they are *seen*). God contains all things in himself, but nothing can wholly contain him. The blessed behold all things in him as if reflected, but not one of the things so reflected is capable of his image in its completeness. This interpretation is confirmed by *Paradiso*, XIX. 49–51.

"E quinci appar *ch' ogni minor natura*
È corto recettacolo a quel bene
Che non ha fine, e sè con sè misura."

[1] Wisdom of Solomon, vii. 26, quoted by Dante (*Convito*, Tr. III. c. 15). There are other passages in the Wisdom of Solomon besides that just cited which we may well believe Dante to have had in his mind when writing the Canzone, beginning, —

"Amor che nella mente mi ragiona,"

and the commentary upon it, and some to which his experience of life must have given an intenser meaning. The writer of that book also personifies Wisdom as the mistress of his soul: "I loved her and sought her out from my youth, I desired to make her my spouse, and I was a lover of her beauty." He says of

There are two beautiful passages in the *Convito*, which we shall quote, both because they have, as we believe, a close application to Dante's own experience, and because they are good specimens of

Wisdom that she was "present when thou (God) madest the world," and Dante in the same way identifies her with the divine Logos, citing as authority the "beginning of the Gospel of John." He tells us, "I perceived that I could not otherwise obtain her except God gave her me," and Dante came at last to the same conclusion. Again, "For the very true beginning of her is the desire of discipline; and the care of discipline is love. And love is the keeping of her laws; and the giving heed unto her laws is the assurance of incorruption." But who can doubt that he read with a bitter exultation, and applied to himself passages like these which follow? "When the righteous *fled from his brother's wrath, she guided him in right paths, showed him the kingdom of God, and gave him knowledge of holy things.* She defended him from his enemies and kept him safe from those that lay in wait, . . . that he might know that godliness is stronger than all. . . . She forsook him not, but delivered him from sin; *she went down with him into the pit*, and left him not in bonds till she brought him the sceptre of the kingdom, . . . and gave him perpetual glory." It was, perhaps, from this book that Dante got the hint of making his punishments and penances typical of the sins that earned them. "Wherefore, whereas men lived dissolutely and unrighteously, thou hast tormented them with their own abominations." Dante was intimate with the Scriptures. They do even a scholar no harm. M. Victor Le Clerc, in his *Histoire Littéraire de la France au quatorzième siècle* (tom. ii. p. 72), thinks it "not impossible" that a passage in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, paraphrased by Dante, may have been suggested to him by Rutebeuf or Tristan, rather than by the prophet himself! Dante would hardly have found himself so much at home in the company of *jongleurs* as in that of prophets. Yet he was familiar with French and Provençal poetry. Beside the evidence of the *Vulgari Eloquio*, there are frequent and broad traces in the *Commedia* of the *Roman de la Rose*, slighter ones of the *Chevalier de la Charette*, *Guillaume d'Orange*, and a direct imitation of Bernard de Ventadour.

his style as a writer of prose. In the manly simplicity which comes of an earnest purpose, and in the eloquence of deep conviction, this is as far beyond that of any of his contemporaries as his verse; nay, more, has hardly been matched by any Italian from that day to this. Illustrating the position that "the highest desire of everything and the first given us by nature is to return to its first cause," he says: "And since God is the beginning of our souls and the maker of them like unto himself, according as was written, 'Let us make man in our image and likeness,' this soul most greatly desires to return to him. And as a pilgrim who goes by a way he has never travelled, who believes every house he sees afar off to be his inn, and not finding it to be so directs his belief to another, and so from house to house till he come to the inn, so our soul forthwith on entering upon the new and never-travelled road of this life directs its eyes to the goal of its highest good, and therefore believes whatever thing it sees that seems to have in it any good to be that. And because its first knowledge is imperfect by reason of not being experienced nor indoctrinated, small goods seem to it great. Wherefore we see children desire most greatly an apple, and then proceeding further on desire a bird, and then further yet desire fine raiment, and then a horse, and then a woman, and then riches not great, and then greater and greater. And this befalls because in none of these things it finds that which it goes seeking, and thinks to find it further on. By which it may be seen that one desirable

stands before another in the eyes of our soul in a fashion as it were pyramidal, for the smallest at first covers the whole of them, and is as it were the apex of the highest desirable, which is God, as it were the base of all; so that the further we go from the apex toward the base the desirables appear greater; and this is the reason why human desires become wider one after the other. Verily this way is lost through error as the roads of earth are; for as from one city to another there is of necessity one best and straightest way, and one that always leads farther from it, that is, the one which goes elsewhere, and many others, some less roundabout and some less direct, so in human life are divers roads whereof one is the truest and another the most deceitful, and certain ones less deceitful, and certain less true. And as we see that that which goes most directly to the city fulfils desire and gives repose after weariness, and that which goes the other way never fulfils it and never can give repose, so it falls out in our life. The good traveller arrives at the goal and repose, the erroneous never arrives thither, but with much weariness of mind, always with greedy eyes looks before him."[1] If we may apply Dante's own method of exposition to this passage, we find him telling us that he first sought felicity in knowledge,

> "That apple sweet which through so many branches
> The care of mortals goeth in pursuit of,"[2]

then in fame, a bird that flits before us as we fol-

[1] *Convito*, Tr. I. c. 12.
[2] *Purgatorio*, XXII. 115, 116.

low,[1] then in being esteemed of men ("to be clothed in purple, . . . to sit next to Darius, . . . and be called Darius his cousin"), then in power,[2] then in the riches of the Holy Spirit in larger and larger measure.[3] He, too, had found that there was but one straight road, whether to the Terrestrial Paradise or the Celestial City, and may come to question by and by whether they be not parallel one with the other, or even parts of the same road, by which only repose is to be reached at last. Then, when in old age "the noble soul returns to God as to that port whence she set forth on the sea of this life, . . . just as to him who comes from a long journey, before he enters into the gate of his city, the citizens thereof go forth to meet him, so the citizens of the eternal life go to meet *her*, and do so because of her good deeds and contemplations, who, having already betaken herself to God,

[1] That Dante loved fame we need not be told. He several times confesses it, especially in the *De Vulgari Eloquio*, I. 17. "How glorious she [the Vulgar Tongue] makes her intimates [*familiares*, those of her household], we ourselves have known, who in the sweetness of this glory put our exile behind our backs."

[2] Dante several times uses the sitting a horse as an image of rule. See especially *Purgatorio*, VI. 99, and *Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 11.

[3] "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God!" Dante quotes this in speaking of the influence of the stars, which, interpreting it presently "by the theological way," he compares to that of the Holy Spirit. "And thy counsel who hath known, except thou give wisdom and send thy Holy Spirit from above?" (Wisdom of Solomon, ix. 17.) The last words of the *Convito* are, "her [Philosophy] whose proper dwelling is in the depths of the Divine mind." The ordinary reading is *ragione* (reason), but it seems to us an obvious blunder for *magione* (mansion, dwelling).

seems to see those whom she believes to be nigh unto God."[1] This also was to be the experience of Dante, for who can doubt that the *Paradiso* was something very unlike a poetical exercise to him who appeals to the visions even of sleep as proof of the soul's immortality?

When did his soul catch a glimpse of that certainty in which "the mind that museth upon many things" can find assured rest? We have already said that we believe Dante's political opinions to have taken their final shape and the *De Monarchia* to have been written before 1300.[2] That the revision of the *Vita Nuova* was completed in that year seems probable from the last sonnet but one, which is addressed to pilgrims on their way to the Santa Veronica at Rome.[3] In this sonnet he still laments

[1] *Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 28.

[2] He refers to a change in his own opinions (lib. ii. § 1), where he says, "When I knew the nations to have murmured against the preëminence of the Roman people, and saw the people imagining vain things *as I myself was wont*." He was a Guelph by inheritance, he became a Ghibelline by conviction.

[3] It should seem from Dante's words ("at the time when much people went to see the blessed image," and "ye seem to come from a far-off people") that this was some extraordinary occasion, and what so likely as the jubilee of 1300? (Compare *Paradiso*, XXXI. 103–108.) Dante's comparisons are so constantly drawn from actual eyesight, that his allusion (*Inferno*, XIII. 28–33) to a device of Boniface VIII. for passing the crowds quietly across the bridge of Saint Angelo, renders it not unlikely that he was in Rome at that time, and perhaps conceived his poem there as Giovanni Villani his chronicle. That Rome would deeply stir his mind and heart is beyond question. "And certes I am of a firm opinion that the stones that stand in her walls are worthy of reverence, and the soil where she sits worthy beyond what is preached and admitted of men." (*Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 5.)

Beatrice as dead; he would make the pilgrims share his grief. It is the very folly of despairing sorrow, that calls on the first comer, stranger though he be, for a sympathy which none can fully give, and he least of all. But in the next sonnet, the last in the book, there is a surprising change of tone. The transfiguration of Beatrice has begun, and we see completing itself that natural gradation of grief which will erelong bring the mourner to call on the departed saint to console him for her own loss. The sonnet is remarkable in more senses than one, first for its psychological truth, and then still more for the light it throws on Dante's inward history as poet and thinker. Hitherto he had celebrated beauty and goodness in the creature; henceforth he was to celebrate them in the Creator whose praise they were.[1] We give an extempore translation of this sonnet, in which the meaning is preserved so far as is possible where the grace is left out. We remember with some compunction as we do it, that Dante has said, "know every one that

[1] *Beatrice, loda di Dio vera, Inferno*, II. 103. "Surely vain are all men by nature who are ignorant of God, and could not out of the good things that are seen know him that is, neither by considering the works did they acknowledge the work-master. . . . For, being conversant in his works, they search diligently and believe their sight, because the things are beautiful that are seen. Howbeit, neither are they to be pardoned." (Wisdom of Solomon, xiii. 1, 7, 8.) *Non adorar debitamente Dio.* "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead; so that they are without excuse." It was these "invisible things" whereof Dante was beginning to get a glimpse.

nothing harmonized by a musical band can be transmuted from its own speech to another without breaking all its sweetness and harmony,"[1] and Cervantes was of the same mind:[2] —

> "Beyond the sphere that hath the widest gyre
> Passeth the sigh[3] that leaves my heart below;
> A new intelligence doth love bestow
> On it with tears that ever draws it higher;
> When it wins thither where is its desire,
> A Lady it beholds who honor so
> And light receives, that, through her splendid glow,
> The pilgrim spirit[4] sees her as in fire;
> It sees her such, that, telling me again
> I understand it not, it speaks so low
> Unto the mourning heart that bids it tell;
> Its speech is of that noble One I know,
> For 'Beatrice' I often hear full plain,
> So that, dear ladies, I conceive it well."

No one can read this in its connection with what goes before and what follows without feeling that a new conception of Beatrice had dawned upon the mind of Dante, dim as yet, or purposely made to seem so, and yet the authentic forerunner of the fulness of her rising as the light of his day and the

[1] *Convito*, Tr. I. c. 7.

[2] "And here we would have forgiven Mr. Captain if he had not betrayed him (*traido*, *traduttore*, *traditore*) to Spain and made him a Castilian, for he took away much of his native worth, and so will all those do who shall undertake to turn a poem into another tongue; for with all the care they take and ability they show, they will never reach the height of its original conception," says the Curate, speaking of a translation of Ariosto. (*Don Quixote*, P. I. c. 6.)

[3] In his own comment Dante says, "I tell whither goes my thought, calling it by the name of one of its effects."

[4] *Spirito* means in Italian both breath (*spirto ed acqua fessi*, *Purgatorio*, XXX. 98) and spirit.

guide of his feet, the divine wisdom whose glory pales all meaner stars. The conception of a poem in which Dante's creed in politics and morals should be picturesquely and attractively embodied, and of the high place which Beatrice should take in it, had begun vaguely to shape itself in his thought. As he brooded over it, of a sudden it defined itself clearly. "Soon after this sonnet there appeared to me a marvellous vision[1] wherein I saw things which made me propose not to say more of that blessed one until I could treat of her more worthily. And to arrive at that I study all I can, as she verily knows. So that, if it be the pleasure of Him through whom all things live, that my life hold out yet a few years, I hope to say that of her which was never yet said of any (woman). And then may it please Him who is the Lord of Courtesy that my soul may go to see the glory of her Lady, that is, of that blessed Beatrice who gloriously beholds the face of Him *qui est per omnia sæcula benedictus.*" It was the method of presentation that became clear to Dante at this time, — the plan of the great poem for whose completion the experience of earth and the inspiration of heaven were to combine, and which was to make him lean for many years.[2] The doctrinal scope of it was already determined. Man, he tells us, is the only creature who partakes at once of the corruptible and incor-

[1] By *visione* Dante means something seen waking by the inner eye. He believed also that dreams were sometimes divinely inspired, and argues from such the immortality of the soul. (*Convito*, Tr. II. c. 9.)

[2] *Paradiso*, XXV. 1–3.

ruptible nature; "and since every nature is ordained to some ultimate end, it follows that the end of man is double. And as among all beings he alone partakes of the corruptible and incorruptible, so alone among all beings he is ordained to a double end, whereof the one is his end as corruptible, the other as incorruptible. That unspeakable Providence therefore foreordered two ends to be pursued by man, to wit, beatitude in this life, which consists in the operation of our own virtue, and is figured by the Terrestrial Paradise, and the beatitude of life eternal, which consists in a fruition of the divine countenance, whereto our own virtue cannot ascend unless aided by divine light, which is understood by the Celestial Paradise." The one we attain by practice of the moral and intellectual virtues as they are taught by philosophers, the other by spiritual teachings transcending human reason, and the practice of the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity. For one, Reason suffices ("which was wholly made known to us by philosophers"), for the other we need the light of supernatural truth revealed by the Holy Spirit and "needful for us." Men led astray by cupidity turn their backs on both, and in their bestiality need bit and rein to keep them in the way. "Wherefore to man was a double guidance needful according to the double end," the Supreme Pontiff in spiritual, the Emperor in temporal things.[1]

[1] *De Monarchia*, lib. iii. § *ult.* See the whole passage in Miss Rossetti, p. 39. It is noticeable that Dante says that the Pope is to *lead* (by example), the Emperor to *direct* (by the enforcing of

But how to put this theory of his into a poetic form which might charm while it was teaching? He would typify Reason in Virgil (who would serve also as a symbol of political wisdom as having celebrated the founding of the Empire), and the grace of God in that Beatrice whom he had already supernaturalized into something which passeth all understanding. In choosing Virgil he was sure of that interest and sympathy which his instinct led him to seek in the predisposition of his readers, for the popular imagination of the Middle Ages had busied itself particularly with the Mantuan poet. The Church had given him a quasi-orthodoxy by interpreting his *jam redit et virgo* as a prophecy of the birth of Christ. At Naples he had become a kind of patron saint, and his bones were exhibited as relics. Dante himself may have heard at Mantua the hymn sung on the anniversary of St. Paul, in which the apostle to the Gentiles is represented as weeping at the tomb of the greatest of poets. Above all, Virgil had described the descent of Æneas to the under-world. Dante's choice of a guide was therefore, in a certain degree, made for him. But the mere Reason[1] of man without

justice). The duty, we are to observe, was a double but not a divided one. To exemplify this unity was indeed one object of the *Commedia*.

[1] "What Reason seeth here
Myself [Virgil] can tell thee; beyond that await
For Beatrice, since 't is a work of Faith."
(*Purgatorio*, XVIII. 46–48.)

Beatrice here evidently impersonates Theology. It would be interesting to know what was the precise date of Dante's theological studies. The earlier commentators all make him go to Paris, the

the illumination of divine Grace cannot be trusted, and accordingly the intervention of Beatrice was needed, — of Beatrice, as Miss Rossetti admirably well expresses it, "already transfigured, potent not only now to charm and soothe, potent to rule; to the Intellect a light, to the Affections a compass and a balance, a sceptre over the Will."

The wood obscure in which Dante finds himself is the world.[1] The three beasts who dispute his way are the sins that most easily beset us, Pride, the Lusts of the Flesh, and Greed. We are surprised that Miss Rossetti should so localize and confine Dante's meaning as to explain them by Florence, France, and Rome. Had he written in so narrow a sense as this, it would indeed be hard to account for the persistent power of his poem.

great fountain of such learning, after his banishment. Boccaccio indeed says that he did not return to Italy till 1311. Wegele (Dante's *Leben und Werke*, p. 85) puts the date of his journey between 1292 and 1297. Ozanam, with a pathos comically touching to the academic soul, laments that poverty compelled him to leave the university without the degree he had so justly earned. He consoles himself with the thought that "there remained to him an incontestable erudition and the love of serious studies." (*Dante et la philosophie catholique*, p. 112.) It *is* sad that we cannot write *Dantes Alighierius, S. T. D.!* Dante seems to imply that he began to devote himself to Philosophy and Theology shortly after Beatrice's death. (*Convito*, Tr. II. c. 13.) He compares himself to one who, "seeking silver, should, without meaning it, find gold, which an occult cause presents to him, not perhaps without the divine command." Here again apparently is an allusion to his having found Wisdom while he sought Learning. He had thought to find God in the beauty of his works, he learned to seek all things in God.

[1] In a more general view, matter, the domain of the senses, no doubt with a recollection of Aristotle's ὕλη.

But it was no political pamphlet that Dante was writing. *Subjectum est Homo*, and it only takes the form of a diary by Dante Alighieri because of the intense realism of his imagination, a realism as striking in the *Paradiso* as the *Inferno*, though it takes a different shape. Everything, the most supersensual, presented itself to his mind, not as abstract idea, but as visible type. As men could once embody a quality of good in a saint and *see* it, as they even now in moments of heightened fantasy or enthusiasm can personify their country and speak of England, France, or America, as if they were real beings, so did Dante habitually.[1] He saw all his thoughts as distinctly as the hypochondriac sees his black dog, and, as in that, their form and color were but the outward form of an inward and spiritual condition. Whatever subsidiary interpretations the poem is capable of, its great and primary value is as the autobiography of a human soul, of yours and mine, it may be, as well as Dante's. In that lie its profound meaning and its permanent force. That an exile, a proud man forced to be dependent, should have found some consolation in brooding over the justice of God, weighed in such different scales from those of man, in contrasting the outward prosperity of the sinner with the awful spiritual ruin within, is not wonderful, nay, we can conceive of his sometimes finding the wrath of God sweeter than his mercy. But it

[1] As we have seen, even a sigh becomes *He*. This makes one of the difficulties of translating his minor poems. The modern mind is incapable of this subtlety.

is wonderful that out of the very wreck of his own life he should have built this three-arched bridge, still firm against the wash and wear of ages, stretching from the Pit to the Empyrean, by which men may pass from a doubt of God's providence to a certainty of his long-suffering and loving-kindness.

> "The Infinite Goodness hath such ample arms
> That it receives whatever turns to it."[1]

A tear is enough to secure the saving clasp of them.[2] It cannot be too often repeated that Dante's Other World is not in its first conception a place of *departed* spirits. It is the Spiritual World, whereof we become denizens by birth and citizens by adoption. It is true that for artistic purposes he makes it conform so far as possible with vulgar preconceptions, but he himself has told us again and again what his real meaning was. Virgil tells Dante, —

> "Thou shalt behold the people dolorous
> Who have foregone the good of intellect."[3]

The "good of the intellect," Dante tells us after Aristotle, is Truth.[4] He says that Virgil has led him "through the deep night of the *truly dead*."[5] Who are they? Dante had in mind the saying of the Apostle, "to be carnally minded is death." He says: "In man to live is to use reason. Then if living is the being of man, to depart from that use is to depart from being, and so to be dead.

[1] *Purgatorio*, III. 122, 123.
[2] *Purgatorio*, V. 107.
[3] *Inferno*, III. 17, 18 (*hanno perduto* = thrown away).
[4] *Convito*, Tr. II. c. 14.
[5] *Purgatorio*, XXIII. 121, 122.

And doth not he depart from the use of reason who doth not reason out the object of his life?" "I say that so vile a person is dead, seeming to be alive. For we must know *that the wicked man may be called truly dead.*" "He is dead who follows not the teacher. And of such a one some might say, how is he dead and yet goes about? I answer that the man is dead and the beast remains."[1] Accordingly he has put living persons in the *Inferno*, like Frate Alberigo and Branca d' Oria, of whom he says with bitter sarcasm that he still "eats and drinks and puts on clothes," as if that were his highest ideal of the true ends of life.[2] There is a passage in the first canto of the *Inferno*[3] which has been variously interpreted: —

> "The ancient spirits disconsolate
> Who cry out each one for the *second death.*"

Miss Rossetti cites it as an example of what she felicitously calls "an ambiguity, not hazy, but prismatic, and therefore not really perplexing." She gives us accordingly our choice of two interpretations: "'Each cries out on account of the second death which he is suffering,' and 'Each cries out for death to come a second time and ease him of his sufferings.'"[4] Buti says: "Here one doubts what the author meant by the second death, and as for me I think he meant the last damnation, which

[1] *Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 7.

[2] *Inferno*, XXXIII. 118, et seq.

[3] *Inferno*, I. 116, 117.

[4] Mr. Longfellow's *for*, like the Italian *per*, gives us the same privilege of election. We "freeze for cold," we "hunger for food."

shall be at the day of judgment, because they would wish through envy that it had already come, that they might have more companions, since the first death is the first damnation, when the soul parted from the body is condemned to the pains of hell for its sins. The second is when, resuscitated at the judgment day, they shall be finally condemned, soul and body together. . . . It may otherwise be understood as annihilation." Imola says, "Each would wish to die again, if he could, to put an end to his pain. Do not hold with some who think that Dante calls the second death the day of judgment," and then quotes a passage from St. Augustine which favors that view. Pietro di Dante gives us four interpretations among which to choose, the first being that, "allegorically, depraved and vicious men are in a certain sense dead in reputation, and this is the first death; the second is that of the body." This we believe to be the true meaning. Dante himself, in a letter to the "most rascally (*scelestissimis*) dwellers in Florence," gives us the key: "but you, transgressors of the laws of God and man, whom the direful maw of cupidity hath enticed not unwilling to every crime, does not the terror of the *second death* torment you?" Their first death was in their sins, the second is what they may expect from the just vengeance of the Emperor Henry VII. The world Dante leads us through is that of his own thought, and it need not surprise us therefore if we meet in it purely imaginary beings like Tristrem [1] and Re-

[1] *Inferno*, V. 67.

noard of the club.[1] His personality is so strongly marked that it is nothing more than natural that his poem should be interpreted as if only he and his opinions, prejudices, or passions were concerned. He would not have been the great poet he was if he had not felt intensely and humanly, but he could never have won the cosmopolitan place he holds had he not known how to generalize his special experience into something mediatorial for all of us. Pietro di Dante in his comment on the thirty-first canto of the *Purgatorio* says that "unless you understand him and his figures allegorically, you will be deceived by the bark," and adds that our author made his pilgrimage as the representative of the rest (*in persona ceterorum*).[2] To give his vision reality, he has adapted it to the vulgar mythology, but to understand it as the author meant, it must be taken in the larger sense. To confine

[1] *Paradiso*, XVIII. 46. Renoard is one of the heroes (a rudely humorous one) in *La Bataille d'Alischans*, an episode of the measureless *Guillaume d'Orange*. It was from the graves of those supposed to have been killed in this battle that Dante draws a comparison, *Inferno*, IX. Boccaccio's comment on this passage might have been read to advantage by the French editors of *Alischans*.

[2] We cite this comment under its received name, though it is uncertain if Pietro was the author of it. Indeed, we strongly doubt it. It is at least one of the earliest, for it appears, by the comment on *Paradiso*, XXVI., that the greater part of it was written before 1341. It is remarkable for the strictness with which it holds to the spiritual interpretation of the poem, and deserves much more to be called Ottimo, than the comment which goes by that name. Its publication is due to the zeal and liberality of the late Lord Vernon, to whom students of Dante are also indebted for the parallel-text reprint of the four earliest editions of the *Commedia*.

it to Florence or to Italy is to banish it from the sympathies of mankind. It was not from the campanile of the Badia that Dante got his views of life and man.

The relation of Dante to literature is monumental, and marks the era at which the modern begins. He is not only the first great poet, but the first great prose writer who used a language not yet subdued to literature, who used it moreover for scientific and metaphysical discussion, thus giving an incalculable impulse to the culture of his countrymen by making the laity free of what had hitherto been the exclusive guild of clerks.[1] Whatever poetry had preceded him, whether in the Romance or Teutonic tongues, is interesting mainly for its simplicity without forethought, or, as in the *Nibelungen*, for a kind of savage grandeur that rouses the sympathy of whatever of the natural man is dormant in us. But it shows no trace of the creative faculty either in unity of purpose or style, the proper characteristics of literature. If it have the charm of wanting artifice, it has not the higher charm of art. We are in the realm of chaos and chance, nebular, with phosphorescent gleams here and there, star-stuff, but uncondensed in stars.

[1] See Wegele, *ubi supra*, p. 174, et seq. The best analysis of Dante's opinions we have ever met with is Emil Ruth's *Studien über Dante Alighieri*, Tübingen, 1853. Unhappily it wants an index, and accordingly loses a great part of its usefulness for those not already familiar with the subject. Nor are its references sufficiently exact. We always respect Dr. Ruth's opinions, if we do not wholly accept them, for they are all the results of original and assiduous study.

The *Nibelungen* is not without far-reaching hints and forebodings of something finer than we find in it, but they are a glamour from the vague darkness which encircles it, like the whisper of the sea upon an unknown shore at night, powerful only over the more vulgar side of the imagination, and leaving no thought, scarce even any image (at least of beauty) behind them. Such poems are the amours, not the lasting friendships and possessions of the mind. They thrill and cannot satisfy.

But Dante is not merely the founder of modern literature. He would have been that if he had never written anything more than his *Canzoni*, which for elegance, variety of rhythm, and fervor of sentiment were something altogether new. They are of a higher mood than any other poems of the same style in their own language, or indeed in any other. In beauty of phrase and subtlety of analogy they remind one of some of the Greek tragic choruses. We are constantly moved in them by a nobleness of tone, whose absence in many admired lyrics of the kind is poorly supplied by conceits. So perfect is Dante's mastery of his material, that in compositions, as he himself has shown, so artificial,[1] the form seems rather organic than mechan-

[1] See the second book of the *De Vulgari Eloquio*. The only other Italian poet who reminds us of Dante in sustained dignity is Guido Guinicelli. Dante esteemed him highly, calls him maximus in the *De Vulgari Eloquio*, and "the father of me and of my betters," in the XXVI. *Purgatorio*. See some excellent specimens of him in Mr. D. G. Rossetti's remarkable volume of translations from the early Italian poets. Mr. Rossetti would do a real and lasting service to literature by employing his singular gift in putting Dante's minor poems into English.

ical, which cannot be said of the best of the Provençal poets who led the way in this kind. Dante's sonnets also have a grace and tenderness which have been seldom matched. His lyrical excellence would have got him into the Collections, and he would have made here and there an enthusiast as Donne does in English, but his great claim to remembrance is not merely Italian. It is that he was the first Christian poet, in any proper sense of the word, the first who so subdued dogma to the uses of plastic imagination as to make something that is still poetry of the highest order after it has suffered the disenchantment inevitable in the most perfect translation. Verses of the kind usually called *sacred* (reminding one of the adjective's double meaning) had been written before his time in the vulgar tongue, such verses as remain inviolably sacred in the volumes of specimens, looked at with distant reverence by the pious, and with far other feelings by the profane reader. There were cycles of poems in which the physical conflict between Christianity and Paganism [1] furnished the subject, but in which the theological views of the authors, whether doctrinal or historical, could hardly be reconciled with any system of religion ancient or modern. There were Church legends of saints and martyrs versified, fit certainly to make any other form of martyrdom seem amiable to those who heard them, and to suggest palliative thoughts about Diocletian. Finally, there were the romances

[1] The old French poems confound all unbelievers together as pagans and worshippers of idols.

of Arthur and his knights, which later, by means of allegory, contrived to be both entertaining and edifying; every one who listened to them paying the minstrel his money, and having his choice whether he would take them as song or sermon. In the heroes of some of these certain Christian virtues were typified, and around a few of them, as the Holy Grail, a perfume yet lingers of cloistered piety and withdrawal. Wolfram von Eschenbach, indeed, has divided his *Parzival* into three books, of Simplicity, Doubt, and Healing, which has led Gervinus to trace a not altogether fanciful analogy between that poem and the *Divina Commedia*. The doughty old poet, who says of himself, —

> "Of song I have some slight control,
> But deem her of a feeble soul
> That doth not love my naked sword
> Above my sweetest lyric word,"

tells us that his subject is the choice between good and evil;

> "Whose soul takes Untruth for its bride
> And sets himself on Evil's side,
> Chooses the Black, and sure it is
> His path leads down to the abyss;
> But he who doth his nature feed
> With steadfastness and loyal deed
> Lies open to the heavenly light
> And takes his portion with the White."

But Wolfram's poem has no system, and shows good feeling rather than settled conviction. Above all it is wandering (as he himself confesses), and altogether wants any controlling purpose. But to whatever extent Christianity had insinuated itself

into and colored European literature, it was mainly as mythology. The Christian idea had never yet incorporated itself. It was to make its avatar in Dante. To understand fully what he accomplished we must form some conception of what is meant by the Christian idea. To bring it into fuller relief, let us contrast it with the Greek idea as it appears in poetry; for we are not dealing with a question of theology so much as with one of æsthetics.

Greek art at its highest point is doubtless the most perfect that we know. But its circle of motives was essentially limited; and the Greek drama in its passion, its pathos, and its humor is primarily Greek, and secondarily human. Its tragedy chooses its actors from certain heroic families, and finds its springs of pity and terror in physical suffering and worldly misfortune. Its best examples, like the *Antigone*, illustrate a single duty, or, like the *Hippolytus*, a single passion, on which, as on a pivot, the chief character, statuesquely simple in its details, revolves as pieces of sculpture are sometimes made to do, displaying its different sides in one invariable light. The general impression left on the mind (and this is apt to be a truer one than any drawn from single examples) is that the duty is one which is owed to custom, that the passion leads to a breach of some convention settled by common consent,[1] and accordingly it is an outraged

[1] Dante is an ancient in this respect as in many others, but the difference is that with him society is something divinely ordained. He follows Aristotle pretty closely, but on his own theory crime and sin are identical.

society whose figure looms in the background, rather than an offended God. At most it was one god of many, and meanwhile another might be friendly. In the Greek epic, the gods are partisans, they hold caucuses, they lobby and log-roll for their candidates. The tacit admission of a revealed code of morals wrought a great change. The complexity and range of passion is vastly increased when the offence is at once both crime and sin, a wrong done against order and against conscience at the same time. The relation of the Greek tragedy to the higher powers is chiefly antagonistic, struggle against an implacable destiny, sublime struggle, and of heroes, but sure of defeat at last. And that defeat is final. Grand figures are those it exhibits to us, in some respects unequalled, and in their severe simplicity they compare with modern poetry as sculpture with painting. Considered merely as works of art, these products of the Greek imagination satisfy our highest conception of form. They suggest inevitably a feeling of perfect completeness, isolation, and independence, of something rounded and finished in itself. The secret of those old shapers died with them; their wand is broken, their book sunk deeper than ever plummet sounded. The type of their work is the Greek temple, which leaves nothing to hope for in unity and perfection of design, in harmony and subordination of parts, and in entireness of impression. But in this æsthetic completeness it ends. It rests solidly and complacently on the earth, and the mind rests there with it.

Now the Christian idea has to do with the human soul, which Christianity may be almost said to have invented. While all Paganism represents a few preëminent families, the founders of dynasties or ancestors of races, as of kin with the gods, Christianity makes every pedigree end in Deity, makes monarch and slave the children of one God. Its heroes struggle not against, but upward and onward *toward*, the higher powers who are always on their side. Its highest conception of beauty is not æsthetic, but moral. With it prosperity and adversity have exchanged meanings. It finds enemies in those worldly good-fortunes where Pagan and even Hebrew literature saw the highest blessing, and invincible allies in sorrow, poverty, humbleness of station, where the former world recognized only implacable foes. While it utterly abolished all boundary lines of race or country and made mankind unitary, its hero is always the individual man whoever and wherever he may be. Above all, an entirely new conception of the Infinite and of man's relation to it came in with Christianity. That, and not the finite, is always the background, consciously or not. It changed the scene of the last act of every drama to the next world. Endless aspiration of all the faculties became thus the ideal of Christian life, and to express it more or less perfectly the ideal of essentially Christian art. It was this which the Middle Ages instinctively typified in the Gothic cathedral, — no accidental growth, but the visible symbol of an inward faith, — which soars forever upward, and

yearns toward heaven like a martyr-flame suddenly turned to stone.

It is not without significance that Goethe, who, like Dante, also absorbed and represented the tendency and spirit of his age, should, during his youth and while Europe was alive with the moral and intellectual longing which preluded the French Revolution, have loved the Gothic architecture. It is no less significant that in the period of reaction toward more positive thought which followed, he should have preferred the Greek. His greatest poem, conceived during the former era, is Gothic. Dante, endeavoring to conform himself to literary tradition, began to write the *Divina Commedia* in Latin, and had elaborated several cantos of it in that dead and intractable material. But that poetic instinct, which is never the instinct of an individual, but of his age, could not so be satisfied, and leaving the classic structure he had begun to stand as a monument of failure, he completed his work in Italian. Instead of endeavoring to manufacture a great poem out of what was foreign and artificial, he let the poem make itself out of him. The epic which he wished to write in the universal language of scholars, and which might have had its ten lines in the history of literature, would sing itself in provincial Tuscan, and turns out to be written in the universal dialect of mankind. Thus all great poets have been in a certain sense provincial, — Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Burns, Scott in the "Heart of Midlothian" and "Bride of Lammermoor," — because the office of the poet is always

vicarious, because nothing that has not been living experience can become living expression, because the collective thought, the faith, the desire of a nation or a race, is the cumulative result of many ages, is something organic, and is wiser and stronger than any single person, and will make a great statesman or a great poet out of any man who can entirely surrender himself to it.

As the Gothic cathedral, then, is the type of the Christian idea, so is it also of Dante's poem. And as that in its artistic unity is but the completed thought of a single architect, which yet could never have been realized except out of the faith and by the contributions of an entire people, whose beliefs and superstitions, whose imagination and fancy, find expression in its statues and its carvings, its calm saints and martyrs now at rest forever in the seclusion of their canopied niches, and its wanton grotesques thrusting themselves forth from every pinnacle and gargoyle, so in Dante's poem, while it is as personal and peculiar as if it were his private journal and autobiography, we can yet read the diary and the autobiography of the thirteenth century and of the Italian people. Complete and harmonious in design as his work is, it is yet no Pagan temple enshrining a type of the human made divine by triumph of corporeal beauty; it is not a private chapel housing a single saint and dedicate to one chosen bloom of Christian piety or devotion; it is truly a cathedral, over whose high altar hangs the emblem of suffering, of the Divine made human to teach the beauty of adversity, the eternal presence

of the spiritual, not overhanging and threatening, but informing and sustaining the material. In this cathedral of Dante's there are side-chapels as is fit, with altars to all Christian virtues and perfections; but the great impression of its leading thought is that of aspiration, for ever and ever. In the three divisions of the poem we may trace something more than a fancied analogy with a Christian basilica. There is first the ethnic forecourt, then the purgatorial middle space, and last the holy of holies dedicated to the eternal presence of the mediatorial God.

But what gives Dante's poem a peculiar claim to the title of the first Christian poem is not merely its doctrinal truth or its Christian mythology, but the fact that the scene of it is laid, not in this world, but in the soul of man; that it is the allegory of a human life, and therefore universal in its significance and its application. The genius of Dante has given to it such a self-subsistent reality, that one almost gets to feel as if the chief value of contemporary Italian history had been to furnish it with explanatory foot-notes, and the age in which it was written assumes towards it the place of a satellite. For Italy, Dante is the thirteenth century.

Most men make the voyage of life as if they carried sealed orders which they were not to open till they were fairly in mid-ocean. But Dante had made up his mind as to the true purpose and meaning of our existence in this world shortly after he had passed his twenty-fifth year. He had already conceived the system about which as a connecting

thread the whole experience of his life, the whole result of his studies, was to cluster in imperishable crystals. The corner-stone of his system was the Freedom of the Will (in other words, the right of private judgment with the condition of accountability), which Beatrice calls the "noble virtue."[1] As to every man is offered his choice between good and evil, and as, even upon the root of a nature originally evil a habit of virtue may be engrafted,[2] no man is excused. "All hope abandon ye who enter in," for they have thrown away reason which is the good of the intellect, "and it seems to me no less a marvel to bring back to reason him in whom it is wholly spent than to bring back to life him who has been four days in the tomb."[3] As a guide of the will in civil affairs the Emperor; in spiritual, the Pope.[4] Dante is not one of those reformers who would assume the office of God to "make all things new." He knew the power of tradition and

[1] *Purgatorio*, XVIII. 73. He defines it in the *De Monarchia* (lib. i. § 14). Among other things he calls it "the first beginning of our liberty." *Paradiso*, V. 19, 20, he calls it "the greatest gift that in his largess God creating made." "Dico quod judicium medium est apprehensionis et appetitus." (*De Monarchia, ubi supra.*)

"Right and wrong,
Between whose endless jar justice resides."
(*Troilus and Cressida.*)

[2] *Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 22.

[3] *Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 7. "Qui descenderit ad inferos, non ascendet." (Job vii. 9.)

[4] But it may be inferred that he put the interests of mankind above both. "For citizens," he says, "exist not for the sake of consuls, nor the people for the sake of the king, but, on the contrary, consuls for the sake of citizens, and the king for the sake of the people."

habit, and wished to utilize it for his purpose. He found the Empire and the Papacy already existing, but both needing reformation that they might serve the ends of their original institution. Bad leadership was to blame; men fit to gird on the sword had been turned into priests, and good preachers spoiled to make bad kings.[1] The spiritual had usurped to itself the prerogatives of the temporal power.

> "Rome, that reformed the world, accustomed was
> Two suns to have which one road and the other,
> Of God and of the world, made manifest.
> One has the other quenched, and to the crosier
> The sword is joined, and ill beseemeth it,
> . . . . . .
> Because, being joined one feareth not the other."[2]

Both powers held their authority directly from God, "not so, however, that the Roman Prince is not in some things subject to the Roman Pontiff, since that human felicity [to be attained only by peace, justice, and good government, possible only under a single ruler] is in some sort ordained to the end of immortal felicity. Let Cæsar use that reverence toward Peter which a first-born son ought to use toward a father; that, shone upon by the light of paternal grace, he may more powerfully illumine the orb of earth over which he is set by him alone who is the ruler of all things spiritual and temporal."[3] As to the fatal gift of Constantine, Dante demonstrates that an Emperor could not alienate what he held only in trust; but if he made the gift, the Pope should hold it as a feudatory of the

[1] *Paradiso*, VIII. 145, 146. [2] *Purgatorio*, XVI. 106–112.
[3] *De Monarchia*, § *ult.*

Empire, for the benefit, however, of Christ's poor.[1] Dante is always careful to distinguish between the Papacy and the Pope. He prophesies for Boniface VIII. a place in hell,[2] but acknowledges him as the Vicar of Christ, goes so far even as to denounce the outrage of Guillaume de Nogaret at Anagni as done to the Saviour himself.[3] But in the Spiritual World Dante acknowledges no such supremacy, and, when he would have fallen on his knees before Adrian V., is rebuked by him in a quotation from the Apocalypse: —

> "Err not, fellow-servant am I
> With thee and with the others to one power."[4]

So impartial was this man whose great work is so often represented as a kind of bag in which he secreted the gall of personal prejudice, so truly Catholic is he, that both parties find their arsenal in him. The Romanist proves his soundness in doctrine, the anti-Romanist claims him as the first Protestant; the Mazzinist and the Imperialist can alike quote him for their purpose. Dante's ardent conviction would not let him see that both Church

[1] *De Monarchia*, lib. iii. § 10. "Poterat tamen Imperator in patrocinium Ecclesiæ patrimonium et alia deputare immoto semper superiori dominio cujus unitas divisio non patitur. Poterat et Vicarius Dei recipere, non tanquam possessor, sed tanquam fructuum pro Ecclesia proque Christi pauperibus dispensator." He tells us that St. Dominic did not ask for the tithes which belong to the poor of God. (*Paradiso*, XII. 93, 94.) "Let them return whence they came," he says (*De Monarchia*, lib. ii. § 10); "they came well, let them return ill, for they were well given and ill held."

[2] *Inferno*, XIX. 53; *Paradiso*, XXX. 145–148.

[3] *Purgatorio*, XX. 86–92.

[4] *Purgatorio*, XIX. 134, 135.

and Empire were on the wane. If an ugly suspicion of this would force itself upon him, perhaps he only clung to both the more tenaciously; but he was no blind theorist. He would reform the Church through the Church, and is less anxious for Italian independence than for Italian good government under an Emperor from Germany rather than from Utopia.

The Papacy was a necessary part of Dante's system, as a supplement to the Empire, which we strongly incline to believe was always foremost in his mind. In a passage already quoted, he says that "the soil where Rome sits is worthy beyond what men preach and admit," that is, as the birthplace of the Empire. Both in the *Convito* and the *De Monarchia* he affirms that the course of Roman history was providentially guided from the first. Rome was founded in the same year that brought into the world David, ancestor of the Redeemer after the flesh. St. Augustine said that "God showed in the most opulent and illustrious Empire of the Romans how much the civil virtues might avail even without true religion, that it might be understood how, this added, men became citizens of another city whose king is truth, whose law charity, and whose measure eternity." Dante goes further than this. He makes the Romans as well as the Jews a chosen people, the one as founders of civil society, the other as depositaries of the true faith.[1] One side of Dante's mind was so practical

[1] This results from the whole course of his argument in the second book of *De Monarchia*, and in the VI. *Paradiso* he calls the

and positive, and his pride in the Romans so intense,[1] that he sometimes seems to regard their mission as the higher of the two. Without peace, which only good government could give, mankind could not arrive at the highest virtue, whether of the active or contemplative life. "And since what is true of the part is true of the whole, and it happens in the particular man that by sitting quietly he is perfected in prudence and wisdom, it is clear that the human race in the quiet or tranquillity of peace is most freely and easily disposed for its proper work which is almost divine, as it is written, 'Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels.'[2] Whence it is manifest that universal peace is the best of those things which are ordained for our beatitude. Hence it is that not riches, not pleasures, not honors, not length of life, not health, not strength, not comeliness, was sung to the shepherds from on high, but peace."[3] It was Dante's experience of the confusion of Italy, where

Roman eagle "the bird of God" and "the scutcheon of God." We must remember that with Dante God is always the "Emperor of Heaven," the barons of whose court are the Apostles. (*Paradiso*, XXIV. 115; Ib., XXV. 17.)

[1] Dante seems to imply (though his name be German) that he was of Roman descent. He makes the original inhabitants of Florence (*Inferno*, XV. 77, 78) of Roman seed; and Cacciaguida, when asked by him about his ancestry, makes no more definite answer than that their dwelling was in the most ancient part of the city. (*Paradiso*, XVI. 40.)

[2] Man was created, according to Dante (*Convito*, Tr. II. c. 6), to supply the place of the fallen angels, and is in a sense superior to the angels, inasmuch as he has reason, which they do not need.

[3] *De Monarchia*, lib. i. § 5.

"One doth gnaw the other
Of those whom one wall and one fosse shut in,"[1]

that suggested the thought of a universal umpire, for that, after all, was to be the chief function of his Emperor. He was too wise to insist on a uniformity of political institutions *a priori*,[2] for he seems to have divined that the surest stay of order, as of practical wisdom, is habit, which is a growth, and cannot be made off-hand. He believed with Aristotle that vigorous minds were intended by nature to rule,[3] and that certain races, like certain men, are born to leadership.[4] He calls democracies, oligarchies, and petty princedoms (*tyrannides*) "oblique policies which drive the human race to slavery, as is patent in all of them to one who reasons."[5] He has nothing but pity for mankind when it has become a many-headed beast, "despising the higher intellect irrefragable in reason, the lower which hath the face of experience."[6] He had no faith in a turbulent equality asserting the divine right of *I'm as good as you*. He thought it fatal to all discipline: "The confounding of persons hath ever been the beginning of sickness in the state."[7] It is the same thought which Shakespeare puts in the mouth of Ulysses: —

"Degree being vizarded,
The unworthiest shows as fairly in the mask.
. . . . When degree is shaked,

[1] *Purgatorio*, VI. 83, 84.
[2] *De Monarchia*, lib. i. § 16.
[3] *De Monarchia*, lib. i. § 5.
[4] *De Monarchia*, lib. ii. § 7.
[5] *De Monarchia*, lib. i. § 14.
[6] *De Monarchia*, lib. i. § 18.
[7] *Purgatorio*, XVI. 67, 68.

Which is the ladder to all high designs,
Then enterprise is sick." [1]

Yet no one can read Dante without feeling that he had a high sense of the worth of freedom, whether in thought or government. He represents, indeed, the very object of his journey through the triple realm of shades as a search after liberty.[2] But it must not be that scramble after undefined and indefinable rights which ends always in despotism, equally degrading whether crowned with a red cap or an imperial diadem. His theory of liberty has for its corner-stone the Freedom of the Will, and the will is free only when the judgment wholly controls the appetite.[3] On such a base even a democracy may rest secure, and on such alone.

Rome was always the central point of Dante's speculation. A shadow of her old sovereignty was still left her in the primacy of the Church, to which unity of faith was essential. He accordingly has no sympathy with heretics of whatever kind. He puts the ex-troubadour Bishop of Marseilles, chief instigator of the horrors of Provence, in paradise.[4] The Church is infallible in spiritual matters, but this is an affair of outward discipline merely, and means the Church as a form of polity. Unity was Dante's leading doctrine, and therefore he puts Mahomet among the schismatics, not because he divided the Church, but the faith.[5]

[1] *Troilus and Cressida*, Act I. s. 3. The whole speech is very remarkable both in thought and phrase.

[2] *Purgatorio*, I. 71.

[3] *De Monarchia*, lib. i. § 14.

[4] *Paradiso*, IX.

[5] *Inferno*, XXXVIII.; *Purgatorio*, XXXII.

Dante's Church was of this world, but he surely believed in another and spiritual one. It has been questioned whether he was orthodox or not. There can be no doubt of it so far as outward assent and conformity are concerned, which he would practise himself and enforce upon others as the first postulate of order, the prerequisite for all happiness in this life. In regard to the Visible Church he was a reformer, but no revolutionist; it is sheer ignorance to speak of him as if there were anything new or exceptional in his denunciation of the corruptions of the clergy. They were the commonplaces of the age, nor were they confined to laymen.[1] To the absolute authority of the Church Dante admitted some exceptions. He denies that the supreme Pontiff has the unlimited power of binding and loosing claimed for him. "Otherwise he might absolve me impenitent, which God himself could not do." [2]

> "By malison of theirs is not so lost
> Eternal Love that it cannot return." [3]

Nor does the sacredness of the office extend to him who chances to hold it. Philip the Fair himself could hardly treat Boniface VIII. worse than he. With wonderful audacity, he declares the Papal throne vacant by the mouth of Saint Peter himself.[4] Even if his theory of a dual government were not

[1] See the poems of Walter Mapes (who was Archdeacon of Oxford); the *Bible Guiot*, and the *Bible au seignor de Berze*, Barbazan and Méon, II.

[2] *De Monarchia*, lib. iii. § 8.

[3] *Purgatorio*, III. 133, 134.

[4] *Paradiso*, XXVII. 22.

in question, Dante must have been very cautious in meddling with the Church. It was not an age that stood much upon ceremony. He himself tells us he had seen men burned alive, and the author of the *Ottimo Comento* says: "I the writer saw followers of his [Fra Dolcino] burned at Padua to the number of twenty-two together."[1] Clearly, in such a time as this, one must not make "the veil of the mysterious verse" *too* thin.[2]

In the affairs of this life Dante was, as we have said, supremely practical, and he makes prudence the chief of the cardinal virtues.[3] He has made up his mind to take things as they come, and to do at Rome as the Romans do.

> "Ah, savage company! but in the Church
> With saints, and in the tavern with the gluttons!"[4]

In the world of thought it was otherwise, and here Dante's doctrine, if not precisely esoteric, was certainly not that of his day, and must be gathered from hints rather than direct statements. The general notion of God was still (perhaps is largely even now) of a provincial, one might almost say a denominational, Deity. The popular poets always represent Macon, Apolin, Tervagant, and the rest as quasi-deities unable to resist the superior strength of the Christian God. The Paynim answers the arguments of his would-be converters with the taunt that he would never worship a divinity who

[1] *Purgatorio*, XXVII. 18; *Ottimo*, *Inferno*, XXVIII. 55.
[2] *Inferno*, IX. 63; *Purgatorio*, VIII. 20.
[3] *Purgatorio*, XXIX. 131, 132.
[4] *Inferno*, XXII. 13, 14.

could not save himself from being done ignominiously to death. Dante evidently was not satisfied with the narrow conception which limits the interest of the Deity to the affairs of Jews and Christians. That saying of Saint Paul, "Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you," had perhaps influenced him, but his belief in the divine mission of the Roman people probably was conclusive. "The Roman Empire had the help of miracles in perfecting itself," he says, and then enumerates some of them. The first is that "under Numa Pompilius, the second king of the Romans, when he was sacrificing according to the rite of the Gentiles, a shield fell from heaven into the city chosen of God."[1] In the *Convito* we find "Virgil speaking in the person of God," and Æacus "wisely having recourse to God," the god being Jupiter.[2] Ephialtes is punished in hell for rebellion against "the Supreme Jove,"[3] and, that there may be no misunderstanding, Dante elsewhere invokes the

> "Jove Supreme,
> Who upon earth for us wast crucified."[4]

It is noticeable also that Dante, with evident design, constantly alternates examples drawn from Christian and Pagan tradition or mythology.[5] He

[1] *De Monarchia*, lib. ii. § 4.

[2] *Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 4; Ib., c. 27; *Æneid*, I. 178, 179; Ovid's *Met.*, VII.

[3] *Inferno*, XXXI. 92.

[4] *Purgatorio*, VI. 118, 119. Pulci, not understanding, has parodied this. (*Morgante*, Canto II. st. 1.)

[5] See, for example, *Purgatorio*, XX. 100–117.

had conceived a unity in the human race, all of whose branches had worshipped the same God under divers names and aspects, and had arrived at the same truth by different roads. We cannot understand a passage in the twenty-sixth *Paradiso*, where Dante inquires of Adam concerning the names of God, except as a hint that the Chosen People had done in this thing even as the Gentiles did.[1] It is true that he puts all Pagans in Limbo, "where without hope they live in longing," and that he makes baptism essential to salvation.[2] But it is noticeable that his Limbo is the Elysium of Virgil, and that he particularizes Adam, Noah, Moses, Abraham, David, and others as prisoners there with the rest till the descent of Christ into hell.[3] But were they altogether without hope? and did baptism mean an immersion of the body or a purification of the soul? The state of the heathen after death had evidently been to Dante one of those doubts that spring up at the foot of every truth. In the *De Monarchia* he says: "There are some judgments of God to which, though human reason cannot attain by its own

[1] We believe that Dante, though he did not understand Greek, knew something of Hebrew. He would have been likely to study it as the sacred language, and opportunities of profiting by the help of learned Jews could not have been wanting to him in his wanderings. In the above-cited passage some of the best texts read *I s' appellava*, and others *Un s' appellava*. God was called *I* (the *Je* in Jehovah) or *One*, and afterwards *El*, — the strong, — an epithet given to many gods. Whichever reading we adopt, the meaning and the inference from it are the same.

[2] *Inferno*, IV.

[3] Dante's "Limbo," of course, is the older "Limbus Patrum."

strength, yet is it lifted to them by the help of faith and of those things which are said to us in Holy Writ, — as to this, that no one, however perfect in the moral and intellectual virtues both as a habit [of the mind] and in practice, can be saved without faith, it being granted that he shall never have heard anything concerning Christ; for the unaided reason of man cannot look upon this as just; nevertheless, with the help of faith, it can." [1] But faith, it should seem, was long in lifting Dante to this height; for in the nineteenth canto of the *Paradiso*, which must have been written many years after the passage just cited, the doubt recurs again, and we are told that it was "a cavern," concerning which he had "made frequent questioning." The answer is given here: —

> "Truly to him who with me subtilizes,
> *If so the Scripture were not over you,*
> For doubting there were marvellous occasion."

But what Scripture? Dante seems cautious, tells us that the eternal judgments are above our comprehension, postpones the answer, and when it comes, puts an orthodox prophylactic before it: —

> "Unto this kingdom never
> Ascended one who had not faith in Christ,
> Before or since he to the tree was nailed.
> But look thou, *many crying are, 'Christ, Christ!'*
> *Who at the judgment shall be far less near*
> *To him than some shall be who knew not Christ.*"

There is, then, some hope for the man born on the bank of Indus who has never heard of Christ? Dante is still cautious, but answers the question in-

[1] *De Monarchia*, lib. ii. § 8.

directly in the next canto by putting the Trojan Ripheus among the blessed: —

"Who would believe, down in the errant world,
That e'er the Trojan Ripheus in this round
Could be the fifth one of these holy lights?
Now knoweth he enough of what the world
Has not the power to see of grace divine,
Although *his* sight may not discern the bottom."

Then he seems to hesitate again, brings in the Church legend of Trajan brought back to life by the prayers of Gregory the Great that he might be converted; and after an interval of fifty lines tells us how Ripheus was saved: —

"The other one, through grace, that from so deep
A fountain wells that never hath the eye
Of any creature reached its primal wave,
Set all his love below on righteousness;
Wherefore from grace to grace did God unclose
His eye to our redemption yet to be,
Whence he believed therein, and suffered not
From that day forth the stench of Paganism,
And he reproved therefor the folk perverse.
Those Maidens three, whom at the right-hand wheel[1]
Thou didst behold, were unto him for baptism
More than a thousand years before baptizing."

If the reader recall a passage already quoted from the *Convito*,[2] he will perhaps think with us that the gate of Dante's *Limbo* is left ajar even for the ancient philosophers to slip out. The divine judgments are still inscrutable, and the ways of God

[1] Faith, Hope, and Charity. (*Purgatorio*, XXIX. 121.) Mr. Longfellow has translated the last verse literally. The meaning is,

"More than a thousand years ere baptism was."

[2] In which the *celestial Athens* is mentioned.

past finding out, but faith would seem to have led Dante at last to a more merciful solution of his doubt than he had reached when he wrote the *De Monarchia*. It is always humanizing to see how the most rigid creed is made to bend before the kindlier instincts of the heart. The stern Dante thinks none beyond hope save those who are dead in sin, and have made evil their good. But we are by no means sure that he is not right in insisting rather on the implacable severity of the law than on the possible relenting of the judge. Exact justice is commonly more merciful in the long run than pity, for it tends to foster in men those stronger qualities which make them good citizens, an object second only with the Roman-minded Dante to that of making them spiritually regenerate, nay, perhaps even more important as a necessary preliminary to it. The inscription over the gate of hell tells us that the terms on which we receive the trust of life were fixed by the Divine Power (which can what it wills), and are therefore unchangeable; by the Highest Wisdom, and therefore for our truest good; by the Primal Love, and therefore the kindest. These are the three attributes of that justice which moved the maker of them. Dante is no harsher than experience, which always exacts the uttermost farthing; no more inexorable than conscience, which never forgives nor forgets. No teaching is truer or more continually needful than that the stains of the soul are ineffaceable, and that though their growth may be arrested, their nature is to spread insidiously till

they have brought all to their own color. Evil is a far more cunning and persevering propagandist than Good, for it has no inward strength, and is driven to seek countenance and sympathy. It must have company, for it cannot bear to be alone in the dark, while

> "Virtue can see to do what Virtue would
> By her own radiant light."

There is one other point which we will dwell on for a moment as bearing on the question of Dante's orthodoxy. His nature was one in which, as in Swedenborg's, a clear practical understanding was continually streamed over by the northern lights of mysticism, through which the familiar stars shine with a softened and more spiritual lustre. Nothing is more interesting than the way in which the two qualities of his mind alternate, and indeed play into each other, tingeing his matter-of-fact sometimes with unexpected glows of fancy, sometimes giving an almost geometrical precision to his most mystical visions. In his letter to Can Grande he says: "It behooves not those to whom it is given to know what is best in us to follow the footprints of the herd; much rather are they bound to oppose its wanderings. For the vigorous in intellect and reason, endowed with a certain divine liberty, are constrained by no customs. Nor is it wonderful, since they are not governed by the laws, but much more govern the laws themselves." It is not impossible that Dante, whose love of knowledge was all-embracing, may have got some hint of the doctrine of the Oriental Sufis. With them the first and lowest

of the steps that lead upward to perfection is the Law, a strict observance of which is all that is expected of the ordinary man whose mind is not open to the conception of a higher virtue and holiness. But the Sufi puts himself under the guidance of some holy man [Virgil in the *Inferno*], whose teaching he receives implicitly, and so arrives at the second step, which is the Path [*Purgatorio*] by which he reaches a point where he is freed from all outward ceremonials and observances, and has risen from an outward to a spiritual worship. The third step is Knowledge [*Paradiso*], endowed by which with supernatural insight, he becomes like the angels about the throne, and has but one farther step to take before he reaches the goal and becomes one with God. The analogies of this system with Dante's are obvious and striking. They become still more so when Virgil takes leave of him at the entrance of the Terrestrial Paradise with the words: —

> "Expect no more a word or sign from me;
> Free and upright and sound is thy free-will,
> And error were it not to do its bidding;
> Thee o'er thyself I therefore crown and mitre,"[1]

that is, "I make thee king and bishop over thyself; the inward light is to be thy law in things both temporal and spiritual." The originality of Dante consists in his not allowing any divorce between the intellect and the soul in its highest sense, in his making reason and intuition work together to the same end of spiritual perfection. The un-

[1] *Purgatorio*, XXVII. 139–142.

satisfactoriness of science leads Faust to seek repose in worldly pleasure; it led Dante to find it in faith, of whose efficacy the shortcoming of all logical substitutes for it was the most convincing argument. That we cannot know, is to him a proof that there is some higher plane on which we can believe and see. Dante had discovered the incalculable worth of a single idea as compared with the largest heap of facts ever gathered. To a man more interested in the soul of things than in the body of them, the little finger of Plato is thicker than the loins of Aristotle.

We cannot but think that there is something like a fallacy in Mr. Buckle's theory that the advance of mankind is necessarily in the direction of science, and not in that of morals. No doubt the laws of morals existed from the beginning, but so also did those of science, and it is by the application, not the mere recognition, of both that the race is benefited. No one questions how much science has done for our physical comfort and convenience, and with the mass of men these perhaps must of necessity precede the quickening of their moral instincts; but such material gains are illusory, unless they go hand in hand with a corresponding ethical advance. The man who gives his life for a principle has done more for his kind than he who discovers a new metal or names a new gas, for the great motors of the race are moral, not intellectual, and their force lies ready to the use of the poorest and weakest of us all. We accept a truth of science so soon as it is demonstrated, are

perfectly willing to take it on authority, can appropriate whatever use there may be in it without the least understanding of its processes, as men send messages by the electric telegraph, but every truth of morals must be redemonstrated in the experience of the individual man before he is capable of utilizing it as a constituent of character or a guide in action. A man does not receive the statements that "two and two make four," and that "the pure in heart shall see God," on the same terms. The one can be proved to him with four grains of corn; he can never arrive at a belief in the other till he realize it in the intimate persuasion of his whole being. This is typified in the mystery of the incarnation. The divine reason must forever manifest itself anew in the lives of men, and that as individuals. This atonement with God, this identification of the man with the truth,[1] so that right action shall not result from the lower reason of utility, but from the higher of a will so purified of self as to sympathize by instinct with the eternal laws,[2] is not something that can be done once for all, that can become historic and traditional, a dead flower pressed between the leaves of the family Bible, but must be renewed in every generation, and in the soul of every man, that it may be valid.

[1] 'I conceived myself to be now," says Milton, "not as mine own person, but as a member incorporate into that truth whereof I was persuaded."

[2] "But now was turning my desire and will,
Even as a wheel that equally is moved,
The Love that moves the sun and other stars."
(*Paradiso*, XXXIII., closing verses of the *Divina Commedia*.)

Certain sects show their recognition of this in what are called revivals, a gross and carnal attempt to apply truth, as it were, mechanically, and to accomplish by the etherization of excitement and the magnetism of crowds what is possible only in the solitary exaltations of the soul. This is the high moral of Dante's poem. We have likened it to a Christian basilica; and as in that so there is here also, painted or carven, every image of beauty and holiness the artist's mind could conceive for the adornment of the holy place. We may linger to enjoy these if we will, but if we follow the central thought that runs like the nave from entrance to choir, it leads us to an image of the divine made human, to teach us how the human might also make itself divine. Dante beholds at last an image of that Power, Love, and Wisdom, one in essence, but trine in manifestation, to answer the needs of our triple nature and satisfy the senses, the heart, and the mind.

"Within the deep and luminous subsistence
Of the High Light appeared to me three circles,
Of threefold color and of one dimension,
And by the second seemed the first reflected
As Iris is by Iris, and the third
Seemed fire that equally from both is breathed.
. . . . . .
Within itself, of its own very color,
Seemed to me painted with our effigy,
Wherefore my sight was all absorbed therein."

He had reached the high altar where the miracle of transubstantiation is wrought, itself also a type of the great conversion that may be accomplished

in our own nature (the lower thing assuming the qualities of the higher), not by any process of reason, but by the very fire of the divine love.

"Then there smote my mind
A flash of lightning wherein came its wish."[1]

Perhaps it seems little to say that Dante was the first great poet who ever made a poem wholly out of himself, but, rightly looked at, it implies a wonderful self-reliance and originality in his genius. His is the first keel that ever ventured into the silent sea of human consciousness to find a new world of poetry.

"L' acqua ch' io prendo giammai non si corse."[2]

He discovered that not only the story of some heroic person, but that of any man might be epical; that the way to heaven was not outside the world, but through it. Living at a time when the end of the world was still looked for as imminent,[3] he believed that the second coming of the Lord was to take place on no more conspicuous stage than the soul of

[1] Dante seems to allude directly to this article of the Catholic faith when he says, on entering the Celestial Paradise, "to signify transhumanizing by words could not be done," and questions whether he was there in the renewed spirit only or in the flesh also: —

"If I was merely *what of me thou newly*
Createdst, Love, who governest the heavens,
Thou knowest, who didst lift me with thy light!"
(*Paradiso*, I. 73–75.)

[2] *Paradiso*, II. 7. Lucretius makes the same boast: —

"Avia Pieridum peragro loca nullius ante
Trita solo."

[3] *Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 15.

man; that his kingdom would be established in the surrendered will. A poem, the precious distillation of such a character and such a life as his through all those sorrowing but undespondent years, must have a meaning in it which few men have meaning enough in themselves wholly to penetrate. That its allegorical form belongs to a past fashion, with which the modern mind has little sympathy, we should no more think of denying than of whitewashing a fresco of Giotto. But we may take it as we may nature, which is also full of double meanings, either as picture or as parable, either for the simple delight of its beauty or as a shadow of the spiritual world. We may take it as we may history, either for its picturesqueness or its moral, either for the variety of its figures, or as a witness to that perpetual presence of God in his creation of which Dante was so profoundly sensible. He had seen and suffered much, but it is only to the man who is himself of value that experience is valuable. He had not looked on man and nature as most of us do, with less interest than into the columns of our daily newspaper. He saw in them the latest authentic news of the God who made them, for he carried everywhere that vision washed clear with tears which detects the meaning under the mask, and, beneath the casual and transitory, the eternal keeping its sleepless watch. The secret of Dante's power is not far to seek. Whoever can express *himself* with the full force of unconscious sincerity will be found to have uttered something ideal and universal. Dante intended a didactic poem, but

the most picturesque of poets could not escape his genius, and his sermon sings and glows and charms in a manner that surprises more at the fiftieth reading than the first, such variety of freshness is in imagination.

There are no doubt in the *Divina Commedia* (regarded merely as poetry) sandy spaces enough both of physics and metaphysics, but with every deduction Dante remains the first of descriptive as well as moral poets. His verse is as various as the feeling it conveys; now it has the terseness and edge of steel, and now palpitates with iridescent softness like the breast of a dove. In vividness he is without a rival. He drags back by its tangled locks the unwilling head of some petty traitor of an Italian provincial town, lets the fire glare on the sullen face for a moment, and it sears itself into the memory forever. He shows us an angel glowing with that love of God which makes him a star even amid the glory of heaven, and the holy shape keeps lifelong watch in our fantasy, constant as a sentinel. He has the skill of conveying impressions indirectly. In the gloom of hell his bodily presence is revealed by his stirring something, on the mount of expiation by casting a shadow. Would he have us feel the brightness of an angel? He makes him whiten afar through the smoke like a dawn,[1] or, walking straight toward the setting sun, he finds his eyes suddenly unable to withstand a greater splendor against which his hand is unavailing to shield

[1] *Purgatorio*, XVI. 142. Here is Milton's "Far off his coming shone."

him. Even its reflected light, then, is brighter than the direct ray of the sun.[1] And how much more keenly do we feel the parched lips of Master Adam for those rivulets of the Casentino which run down into the Arno, "making their channels cool and soft"! His comparisons are as fresh, as simple, and as directly from nature as those of Homer.[2] Sometimes they show a more subtle observation, as where he compares the stooping of Antæus over him to the leaning tower of Garisenda, to which the clouds, flying in an opposite direction to its inclination, give away their motion.[3] His suggestions of individuality, too, from attitude or speech, as in Farinata, Sordello, or Pia,[4] give in a hint what is worth acres of so-called character-painting. In straightforward pathos, the single and sufficient thrust of phrase, he has no competitor. He is too sternly touched to be effusive and tearful:

"Io non piangeva, sì dentro impietrai."[5]

His is always the true coin of speech,

[1] *Purgatorio*, XV. 7, et seq.

[2] See, for example, *Inferno*, XVII. 127–132; Ib. XXIV. 7–12; *Purgatorio*, II. 124–129; Ib., III. 79–84; Ib., XXVII. 76–81; *Paradiso*, XIX. 91–93; Ib. XXI. 34–39; Ib. XXIII. 1–9.

[3] *Inferno*, XXXI. 136–138.

"And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars."

(Coleridge, *Dejection, an Ode.*)

See also the comparison of the dimness of the faces seen around him in Paradise to "a pearl on a white forehead." (*Paradiso*, III. 14.)

[4] *Inferno*, X. 35–41; *Purgatorio*, VI. 61–66; Ib., X. 133.

[5] For example, Cavalcanti's *Come dicesti egli ebbe?* (*Inferno*, X. 67, 68.) Anselmuccio's *Tu guardi sì, padre, che hai?* (*Inferno*, XXXIII. 51.)

" Sì lucida e sì tonda
Che nel suo conio nulla ci s' inforsa,"

and never the highly ornamented promise to pay, token of insolvency.

No doubt it is primarily by his poetic qualities that a poet must be judged, for it is by these, if by anything, that he is to maintain his place in literature. And he must be judged by them absolutely, with reference, that is, to the highest standard, and not relatively to the fashions and opportunities of the age in which he lived. Yet these considerations must fairly enter into our decision of another side of the question, and one that has much to do with the true quality of the man, with his character as distinguished from his talent, and therefore with how much he will influence men as well as delight them. We may reckon up pretty exactly a man's advantages and defects as an artist; these he has in common with others, and they are to be measured by a recognized standard; but there is something in his *genius* that is incalculable. It would be hard to define the causes of the difference of impression made upon us respectively by two such men as Æschylus and Euripides, but we feel profoundly that the latter, though in some respects a better dramatist, was an infinitely lighter weight. Æschylus stirs something in us far deeper than the sources of mere pleasurable excitement. The man behind the verse is far greater than the verse itself, and the impulse he gives to what is deepest and most sacred in us, though we cannot always explain it, is none the less real and lasting. Some men

always seem to remain outside their work; others make their individuality felt in every part of it; their very life vibrates in every verse, and we do not wonder that it has "made them lean for many years." The virtue that has gone out of them abides in what they do. The book such a man makes is indeed, as Milton called it, "the precious lifeblood of a master spirit." Theirs is a true immortality, for it is their soul, and not their talent, that survives in their work. Dante's concise forthrightness of phrase, which to that of most other poets is as a stab [1] to a blow with a cudgel, the vigor of his thought, the beauty of his images, the refinement of his conception of spiritual things, are marvellous if we compare him with his age and its best achievement. But it is for his power of inspiring and sustaining, it is because they find in him a spur to noble aims, a secure refuge in that defeat which the present always seems, that they prize Dante who know and love him best. He is not merely a great poet, but an influence, part of the soul's resources in time of trouble. From him she learns that, "married to the truth, she is a mistress, but otherwise a slave shut out of all liberty." [2]

All great poets have their message to deliver us, from something higher than they. We venture on no unworthy comparison between him who reveals

[1] To the "bestiality" of certain arguments Dante says, "one would wish to reply, not with words, but with a knife." (*Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 14.)

[2] *Convito*, Tr. IV. c. 2.

to us the beauty of this world's love and the grandeur of this world's passion and him who shows that love of God is the fruit whereof all other loves are but the beautiful and fleeting blossom, that the passions are yet sublimer objects of contemplation, when, subdued by the will, they become patience in suffering and perseverance in the upward path. But we cannot help thinking that if Shakespeare be the most comprehensive intellect, so Dante is the highest spiritual nature that has expressed itself in rhythmical form. Had he merely made us feel how petty the ambitions, sorrows, and vexations of earth appear when looked down on from the heights of our own character and the seclusion of our own genius, or from the region where we commune with God, he had done much:

> "I with my sight returned through one and all
> The sevenfold spheres, and I beheld this globe
> Such that I smiled at its ignoble semblance."[1]

But he has done far more; he has shown us the way by which that country far beyond the stars may be reached, may become the habitual dwelling-place and fortress of our nature, instead of being the object of its vague aspiration in moments of indolence. At the Round Table of King Arthur there was left always one seat empty for him who should accomplish the adventure of the Holy Grail. It was called the perilous seat because of the dangers he must encounter who would win it. In the company of the epic poets there was a place left for whoever should embody the Christian idea of a

[1] *Paradiso*, XXII. 132–135; Ib., XXVII. 110.

triumphant life, outwardly all defeat, inwardly victorious, who should make us partakers of that cup of sorrow in which all are communicants with Christ. He who should do this would indeed achieve the perilous seat, for he must combine poesy with doctrine in such cunning wise that the one lose not its beauty nor the other its severity, — and Dante has done it. As he takes possession of it we seem to hear the cry he himself heard when Virgil rejoined the company of great singers,

"All honor to the loftiest of poets!"

SPENSER

1875

CHAUCER had been in his grave one hundred and fifty years ere England had secreted choice material enough for the making of another great poet. The nature of men living together in societies, as of the individual man, seems to have its periodic ebbs and floods, its oscillations between the ideal and the matter-of-fact, so that the doubtful boundary line of shore between them is in one generation a hard sandy actuality strewn only with such remembrances of beauty as a dead sea-moss here and there, and in the next is whelmed with those lacelike curves of ever-gaining, ever-receding foam, and that dance of joyous spray which for a moment catches and holds the sunshine.

From the two centuries between 1400 and 1600 the indefatigable Ritson in his *Bibliographia Poetica* has made us a catalogue of some six hundred English poets, or, more properly, verse-makers. Ninety-nine in a hundred of them are mere names, most of them no more than shadows of names, some of them mere initials. Nor can it be said of them that their works have perished because they were written in an obsolete dialect; for it is the poem that keeps the language alive, and not the language

that buoys up the poem. The revival of letters, as it is called, was at first the revival of *ancient* letters, which, while it made men pedants, could do very little towards making them poets, much less towards making them original writers. There was nothing left of the freshness, vivacity, invention, and careless faith in the present which make many of the productions of the Norman Trouvères delightful reading even now. The whole of Europe during the fifteenth century produced no book which has continued readable, or has become in any sense of the word a classic. I do not mean that that century has left us no illustrious names, that it was not enriched with some august intellects who kept alive the apostolic succession of thought and speculation, who passed along the still unextinguished torch of intelligence, the *lampada vitæ*, to those who came after them. But a classic is properly a book which maintains itself by virtue of that happy coalescence of matter and style, that innate and exquisite sympathy between the thought that gives life and the form that consents to every mood of grace and dignity, which can be simple without being vulgar, elevated without being distant, and which is something neither ancient nor modern, always new and incapable of growing old. It is not his Latin which makes Horace cosmopolitan, nor can Béranger's French prevent his becoming so. No hedge of language however thorny, no dragon-coil of centuries, will keep men away from these true apples of the Hesperides if once they have caught sight or scent of

them. If poems die, it is because there was never true life in them, that is, that true poetic vitality which no depth of thought, no airiness of fancy, no sincerity of feeling, can singly communicate, but which leaps throbbing at touch of that shaping faculty the imagination. Take Aristotle's ethics, the scholastic philosophy, the theology of Aquinas, the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, the small politics of a provincial city of the Middle Ages, mix in at will Grecian, Roman, and Christian mythology, and tell me what chance there is to make an immortal poem of such an incongruous mixture. Can these dry bones live? Yes, Dante can create such a soul under these ribs of death that one hundred and fifty editions of his poem shall be called for in these last sixty years, the first half of the sixth century since his death. Accordingly I am apt to believe that the complaints one sometimes hears of the neglect of our older literature are the regrets of archæologists rather than of critics. One does not need to advertise the squirrels where the nut-trees are, nor could any amount of lecturing persuade them to spend their teeth on a hollow nut.

On the whole, the Scottish poetry of the fifteenth century has more meat in it than the English, but this is to say very little. Where it is meant to be serious and lofty it falls into the same vices of unreality and allegory which were the fashion of the day, and which there are some patriots so fearfully and wonderfully made as to relish. Stripped of the archaisms (that turn every *y* to a meaningless *z*, spell which *quhilk*, shake *schaik*, bugle *bowgill*,

powder *puldir*, and will not let us simply whistle till we have puckered our mouths to *quhissill*) in which the Scottish antiquaries love to keep it disguised, — as if it were nearer to poetry the further it got from all human recognition and sympathy, — stripped of these, there is little to distinguish it from the contemporary verse-mongering south of the Tweed. Their compositions are generally as stiff and artificial as a trellis, in striking contrast with the popular ballad-poetry of Scotland (some of which possibly falls within this period, though most of it is later), which clambers, lawlessly if you will, but at least freely and simply, twining the bare stem of old tradition with graceful sentiment and lively natural sympathies. I find a few sweet and flowing verses in Dunbar's "Merle and Nightingale," — indeed one whole stanza that has always seemed exquisite to me. It is this: —

> "Ne'er sweeter noise was heard by living man
> Than made this merry, gentle nightingale.
> Her sound went with the river as it ran
> Out through the fresh and flourished lusty vale;
> O merle, quoth she, O fool, leave off thy tale,
> For in thy song good teaching there is none,
> For both are lost, — the time and the travail
> Of every love but upon God alone."

But except this lucky poem, I find little else in the serious verses of Dunbar that does not seem to me tedious and pedantic. I dare say a few more lines might be found scattered here and there, but I hold it a sheer waste of time to hunt after these thin needles of wit buried in unwieldy haystacks of verse. If that be genius, the less we have of it

the better. His "Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins," over which the excellent Lord Hailes went into raptures, is wanting in everything but coarseness; and if his invention dance at all, it is like a galley-slave in chains under the lash. It would be well for us if the sins themselves were indeed such wretched bugaboos as he has painted for us. What he means for humor is but the dullest vulgarity; his satire would be Billingsgate if it could, and, failing, becomes a mere offence in the nostrils, for it takes a great deal of salt to keep scurrility sweet. Mr. Sibbald, in his "Chronicle of Scottish Poetry," has admiringly preserved more than enough of it, and seems to find a sort of national savor therein, such as delights his countrymen in a *haggis*, or the German in his *sauer-kraut*. The uninitiated foreigner puts his handkerchief to his nose, wonders, and gets out of the way as soon as he civilly can. Barbour's "Brus," if not precisely a poem, has passages whose simple tenderness raises them to that level. That on Freedom is familiar.[1] But its highest merit is the natural and unstrained tone of manly courage in it, the easy and familiar way in which Barbour always takes chivalrous conduct as a matter of course, as if heroism were the least you could ask of any man. I modernize a few verses to show what I mean. When the King of England turns to fly from the battle of Bannockburn (and

[1] Though always misapplied in quotation, as if he had used the word in that generalized meaning which is common now, but which could not without an impossible anachronism have been present to his mind. He meant merely freedom from prison.

Barbour with his usual generosity tells us he has heard that Sir Aymer de Valence led him away by the bridle-rein against his will), Sir Giles d'Argente

> "Saw the king thus and his menie
> Shape them to flee so speedily,
> He came right to the king in hy [hastily]
> And said, 'Sir, since that is so
> That ye thus gate your gate will go,
> Have ye good-day, for back will I:
> Yet never fled I certainly,
> And I choose here to bide and die
> Than to live shamefully and fly.'"

The "Brus" is in many ways the best rhymed chronicle ever written. It is national in a high and generous way, but I confess I have little faith in that quality in literature which is commonly called nationality, — a kind of praise seldom given where there is anything better to be said. Literature that loses its meaning, or the best part of it, when it gets beyond sight of the parish steeple, is not what I understand by literature. To tell you when you cannot fully taste a book that it is because it is so thoroughly national, is to condemn the book. To say it of a poem is even worse, for it is to say that what should be true of the whole compass of human nature is true only to some north-and-by-east-half-east point of it. I can understand the nationality of Firdusi when, looking sadly back to the former glories of his country, he tells us that "the nightingale still sings old Persian"; I can understand the nationality of Burns when he turns his plough aside to spare the rough

burr thistle, and hopes he may write a song or two for dear auld Scotia's sake. That sort of nationality belongs to a country of which we are all citizens, — that country of the heart which has no boundaries laid down on the map. All great poetry must smack of the soil, for it must be rooted in it, must suck life and substance from it, but it must do so with the aspiring instinct of the pine that climbs forever toward diviner air, and not in the grovelling fashion of the potato. Any verse that makes you and me foreigners is not only not great poetry, but no poetry at all. Dunbar's works were disinterred and edited some thirty years ago by Mr. Laing, and whoso is national enough to like thistles may browse there to his heart's content. I am inclined for other pasture, having long ago satisfied myself by a good deal of dogged reading that every generation is sure of its own share of bores without borrowing from the past.

A little later came Gawain Douglas, whose translation of the Æneid is linguistically valuable, and whose introductions to the seventh and twelfth books — the one describing winter and the other May — have been safely praised, they are so hard to read. There is certainly some poetic feeling in them, and the welcome to the sun comes as near enthusiasm as is possible for a ploughman, with a good steady yoke of oxen, who lays over one furrow of verse, and then turns about to lay the next as cleverly alongside it as he can. But it is a wrong done to good taste to hold up this *item* kind of description any longer as deserving any other credit than that of

a good memory. It is a mere bill of parcels, a *post-mortem* inventory of nature, where imagination is not merely not called for, but would be out of place. Why, a recipe in the cookery-book is as much like a good dinner as this kind of stuff is like true word-painting. The poet with a real eye in his head does not give us everything, but only the *best* of everything. He selects, he combines, or else gives what is characteristic only; while the false style of which I have been speaking seems to be as glad to get a pack of impertinences on its shoulders as Christian in the Pilgrim's Progress was to be rid of his. One strong verse that can hold itself upright (as the French critic Rivarol said of Dante) with the bare help of the substantive and verb, is worth acres of this dead cord-wood piled stick on stick, a boundless continuity of dryness. I would rather have written that half-stanza of Longfellow's, in the "Wreck of the Hesperus," of the "billow that swept her crew like icicles from her deck," than all Gawain Douglas's tedious enumeration of meteorological phenomena put together. A real landscape is never tiresome; it never presents itself to us as a disjointed succession of isolated particulars; we take it in with one sweep of the eye, — its light, its shadow, its melting gradations of distance: we do not say it is this, it is that, and the other; and we may be sure that if a description in poetry is tiresome there is a grievous mistake somewhere. All the pictorial adjectives in the dictionary will not bring it a hair's-breadth nearer to truth and nature. The fact is that what

we see is in the mind to a greater degree than we are commonly aware. As Coleridge says, —

> "O lady, we receive but what we give,
> And in our life alone doth Nature live!"

I have made the unfortunate Dunbar the text for a diatribe on the subject of descriptive poetry, because I find that this old ghost is not laid yet, but comes back like a vampire to suck the life out of a true enjoyment of poetry, — and the medicine by which vampires were cured was to unbury them, drive a stake through them, and get them under ground again with all despatch. The first duty of the Muse is to be delightful, and it is an injury done to all of us when we are put in the wrong by a kind of statutory affirmation on the part of the critics of something to which our judgment will not consent, and from which our taste revolts. A collection of poets is commonly made up, nine parts in ten, of this perfunctory verse-making, and I never look at one without regretting that we have lost that excellent Latin phrase, *Corpus poetarum*. In fancy I always read it on the backs of the volumes, — a *body* of poets, indeed, with scarce one soul to a hundred of them.

One genuine English poet illustrated the early years of the sixteenth century, — John Skelton. He had vivacity, fancy, humor, and originality. Gleams of the truest poetical sensibility alternate in him with an almost brutal coarseness. He was truly Rabelaisian before Rabelais. But there is a freedom and hilarity in much of his writing that gives it a singular attraction. A breath of cheer-

fulness runs along the slender stream of his verse, under which it seems to ripple and crinkle, catching and casting back the sunshine like a stream blown on by clear western winds.

But Skelton was an exceptional blossom of autumn. A long and dreary winter follows. Surrey, who brought back with him from Italy the blank-verse not long before introduced by Trissino, is to some extent another exception. He had the sentiment of nature and unhackneyed feeling, but he has no mastery of verse, nor any elegance of diction. We have Gascoigne, Surrey, Wyatt, stiff, pedantic, artificial, systematic as a country cemetery, and, worst of all, the whole time desperately in love. Every verse is as flat, thin, and regular as a lath, and their poems are nothing more than bundles of such tied trimly together. They are said to have refined our language. Let us devoutly hope they did, for it would be pleasant to be grateful to them for something. But I fear it was not so, for only genius can do that; and Sternhold and Hopkins are inspired men in comparison with them. For Sternhold was at least the author of two noble stanzas: —

> "The Lord descended from above
> And bowed the heavens high,
> And underneath his feet he cast
> The darkness of the sky;
>
> "On cherubs and on cherubims
> Full royally he rode,
> And on the wings of all the winds
> Came flying all abroad."

But Gascoigne and the rest did nothing more than

put the worst school of Italian love poetry into an awkward English dress. The Italian proverb says, "Inglese italianizzato, Diavolo incarnato," that an Englishman Italianized is the very devil incarnate, and one feels the truth of it here. The very titles of their poems set one yawning, and their wit is the cause of the dulness that is in other men. "The lover, deceived by his love, repenteth him of the true love he bare her." As thus: —

> "Where I sought heaven there found I hap;
> From danger unto death,
> Much like the mouse that treads the trap
> In hope to find her food,
> And bites the bread that stops her breath, —
> So in like case I stood."

"The lover, accusing his love for her unfaithfulness, proposeth to live in liberty." He says: —

> "But I am like the beaten fowl
> That from the net escaped,
> And thou art like the ravening owl
> That all the night hath waked."

And yet at the very time these men were writing there were simple ballad-writers who could have set them an example of simplicity, force, and grandeur. Compare the futile efforts of these poetasters to kindle themselves by a painted flame, and to be pathetic over the lay figure of a mistress, with the wild vigor and almost fierce sincerity of the "Twa Corbies": —

> "As I was walking all alone
> I heard twa corbies making a moan.
> The one unto the other did say,
> Where shall we gang dine to-day?
> In beyond that old turf dyke

I wot there lies a new-slain knight;
And naebody kens that he lies there
But his hawk and his hound and his lady fair.
His hound is to the hunting gone,
His hawk to fetch the wild fowl home,
His lady has ta'en another mate,
So we may make our dinner sweet.
O'er his white bones as they lie bare
The wind shall blow forevermair."

There was a lesson in rhetoric for our worthy friends, could they have understood it. But they were as much afraid of an attack of nature as of the plague.

Such was the poetical inheritance of style and diction into which Spenser was born, and which he did more than any one else to redeem from the leaden gripe of vulgar and pedantic conceit. Sir Philip Sidney, born the year after him, with a keener critical instinct, and a taste earlier emancipated than his own, would have been, had he lived longer, perhaps even more directly influential in educating the taste and refining the vocabulary of his contemporaries and immediate successors. The better of his pastoral poems in the "Arcadia" are, in my judgment, more simple, natural, and, above all, more pathetic than those of Spenser, who sometimes strains the shepherd's pipe with a blast that would better suit the trumpet. Sidney had the good sense to feel that it was unsophisticated sentiment rather than rusticity of phrase that befitted such themes.[1] He recognized the distinction between simplicity and vulgarity, which Wordsworth

[1] In his *Defence of Poesy* he condemns the archaisms and provincialisms of the *Shepherd's Calendar*.

was so long in finding out, and seems to have divined the fact that there is but one kind of English that is always appropriate and never obsolete, namely, the very best.[1] With the single exception of Thomas Campion, his experiments in adapting classical metres to English verse are more successful than those of his contemporaries. Some of his elegiacs are not ungrateful to the ear, and it can hardly be doubted that Coleridge borrowed from his eclogue of Strephon and Klaius the pleasing movement of his own *Catullian Hendecasyllabics*. Spenser, perhaps out of deference to Sidney, also tried his hand at English hexameters, the introduction of which was claimed by his friend Gabriel Harvey, who thereby conceived that he had assured to himself an immortality of grateful remembrance. But the result was a series of jolts and jars, proving that the language had run off the track. He seems to have been half conscious of it himself, and there is a gleam of mischief in what he writes to Harvey: "I like your late English hexameter so exceedingly well that I also enure my pen sometime in that kind, which I find indeed, as I have often heard you defend in word, neither so hard nor so harsh but that it will easily yield itself to our mother-tongue. For the only or chiefest hardness, which seemeth, is in the accent, which some-

[1] "There is, as you must have heard Wordsworth point out, a language of pure, intelligible English, which was spoken in Chaucer's time, and is spoken in ours; equally understood then and now; and of which the Bible is the written and permanent standard, as it has undoubtedly been the great means of preserving it." (*Southey's Life and Correspondence*, iii. 193, 194.)

time gapeth, and, as it were, yawneth ill-favoredly, coming short of that it should, and sometime exceeding the measure of the number, as in *Carpenter;* the middle syllable being used short in speech, when it shall be read long in verse, seemeth like a lame gosling that draweth one leg after her; and *Heaven* being used short as one syllable, when it is in verse stretched out with a diastole, is like a lame dog that holds up one leg." [1] It is almost inconceivable that Spenser's hexameters should have been written by the man who was so soon to teach his native language how to soar and sing, and to give a fuller sail to English verse.

One of the most striking facts in our literary history is the preëminence at once so frankly and unanimously conceded to Spenser by his contemporaries. At first, it is true, he had not many rivals. Before the "Faery Queen" two long poems were printed and popular, — the "Mirror for Magistrates" and Warner's "Albion's England," — and not long after it came the "Polyolbion" of Drayton and the "Civil Wars" of Daniel. This was the period of the saurians in English poetry, interminable poems, book after book and canto after canto, like far-stretching *vertebræ*, that at first

[1] Nash, who has far better claims than Swift to be called the English Rabelais, thus at once describes and parodies Harvey's hexameters in prose, "that drunken, staggering kind of verse, which is all up hill and down hill, like the way betwixt Stamford and Beechfield, and goes like a horse plunging through the mire in the deep of winter, now soused up to the saddle, and straight aloft on his tiptoes." It was a happy thought to satirize (in this inverted way) prose written in the form of verse, for the last twelve words make a hexameter.

Edmund Spenser

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sight would seem to have rendered earth unfit for the habitation of man. They most of them sleep well now, as once they made their readers sleep, and their huge remains lie embedded in the deep morasses of Chalmers and Anderson. We wonder at the length of face and general atrabilious look that mark the portraits of the men of that generation, but it is no marvel when even their relaxations were such downright hard work. Fathers when their day on earth was up must have folded down the leaf and left the task to be finished by their sons, — a dreary inheritance. Yet both Drayton and Daniel are fine poets, though both of them in their most elaborate works made shipwreck of their genius on the shoal of a bad subject. Neither of them could make poetry coalesce with gazetteering or chronicle-making. It was like trying to put a declaration of love into the forms of a declaration in trover. The "Polyolbion" is nothing less than a versified gazetteer of England and Wales, — fortunately Scotland was not yet annexed, or the poem would have been even longer, and already it is the plesiosaurus of verse. Mountains, rivers, and even marshes are personified, to narrate historical episodes, or to give us geographical lectures. There are two fine verses in the seventh book, where, speaking of the cutting down some noble woods, he says, —

> "Their trunks like aged folk now bare and naked stand,[1]
> As for revenge to heaven each held a withered hand";

and there is a passage about the sea in the twen-

[1] Probably suggested by a verse of Spenser cited *infra*.

tieth book that comes near being fine; but the far greater part is mere joiner-work. Consider the life of man, that we flee away as a shadow, that our days are as a post, and then think whether we can afford to honor such a draft upon our time as is implied in these thirty books all in alexandrines! Even the laborious Selden, who wrote annotations on it, sometimes more entertaining than the text, gave out at the end of the eighteenth book. Yet Drayton could write well, and had an agreeable lightsomeness of fancy, as his "Nymphidia" proves. His poem "To the Cambrio-Britons on their Harp" is full of vigor; it runs, it leaps, clashing its verses like swords upon bucklers, and moves the pulse to a charge.

Daniel was in all respects a man of finer mould. He did indeed refine our tongue, and deserved the praise his contemporaries concur in giving him of being "well-languaged." [1] Writing two hundred and fifty years ago, he stands in no need of a glossary, and I have noted scarce a dozen words, and not more turns of phrase, in his works, that have become obsolete. This certainly indicates both remarkable taste and equally remarkable judgment. There is a conscious dignity in his thought and

[1] Edmund Bolton in his *Hypercritica* says, "The works of Sam Daniel contained somewhat a flat, but yet withal a very pure and copious English, and words as warrantable as any man's, and *fitter perhaps for prose than measure.*" I have italicized his second thought, which chimes curiously with the feeling Daniel leaves in the mind. (See Haslewood's *Ancient Crit. Essays*, vol. ii.) Wordsworth, an excellent judge, much admired Daniel's poem to the Countess of Cumberland.

sentiment such as we rarely meet. His best poems always remind me of a table-land, where, because all is so level, we are apt to forget on how lofty a plane we are standing. I think his "Musophilus" the best poem of its kind in the language. The reflections are natural, the expression condensed, the thought weighty, and the language worthy of it. But he also wasted himself on an historical poem, in which the characters were incapable of that remoteness from ordinary associations which is essential to the ideal. Not that we can escape into the ideal by *merely* emigrating into the past or the unfamiliar. As in the German legend the little black Kobold of prose that haunts us in the present will seat himself on the first load of furniture when we undertake our flitting, if the magician be not there to exorcise him. No man can jump off his own shadow, nor, for that matter, off his own age, and it is very likely that Daniel had only the thinking and languaging parts of a poet's outfit, without the higher creative gift which alone can endow his conceptions with enduring life and with an interest which transcends the parish limits of his generation. In the prologue to his "Masque at Court" he has unconsciously defined his own poetry: —

> "Wherein no wild, no rude, no antic sport,
> But tender passions, motions soft and grave,
> The still spectator must expect to have."

And indeed his verse does not snatch you away from ordinary associations and hurry you along with it as is the wont of the higher kinds of poetry,

but leaves you, as it were, upon the bank watching the peaceful current and lulled by its somewhat monotonous murmur. His best-known poem, blunderingly misprinted in all the collections, is that addressed to the Countess of Cumberland. It is an amplification of Horace's *Integer Vitæ*, and when we compare it with the original we miss the point, the compactness, and above all the urbane tone of the original. It is very fine English, but it is the English of diplomacy somehow, and is never downright this or that, but always has the honor to be so or so, with sentiments of the highest consideration. Yet the praise of *well-languaged*, since it implies that good writing then as now demanded choice and forethought, is not without interest for those who would classify the elements of a style that will wear and hold its colors well. His diction, if wanting in the more hardy evidences of muscle, has a suppleness and spring that give proof of training and endurance. His "Defence of Rhyme," written in prose (a more difficult test than verse), has a passionate eloquence that reminds one of Burke, and is more light-armed and modern than the prose of Milton fifty years later. For us Occidentals he has a kindly prophetic word: —

> "And who in time knows whither we may vent
> The treasure of our tongue ? to what strange shores
> The gain of our best glory may be sent
> To enrich unknowing nations with our stores ?
> What worlds in the yet unformed Occident
> May come refined with accents that are ours ? "

During the period when Spenser was getting his artistic training, a great change was going on in

our mother-tongue, and the language of literature was disengaging itself more and more from that of ordinary talk. The poets of Italy, Spain, and France began to rain influence and to modify and refine not only style but vocabulary. Men were discovering new worlds in more senses than one, and the visionary finger of expectation still pointed forward. There was, as we learn from contemporary pamphlets, very much the same demand for a national literature that we have heard in America. This demand was nobly answered in the next generation. But no man contributed so much to the transformation of style and language as Spenser; for not only did he deliberately endeavor at reform, but by the charm of his diction, the novel harmonies of his verse, his ideal method of treatment, and the splendor of his fancy, he made the new manner popular and fruitful. We can trace in Spenser's poems the gradual growth of his taste through experiment and failure to that assured self-confidence which indicates that he had at length found out the true bent of his genius, — that happiest of discoveries (and not so easy as it might seem) which puts a man in undisturbed possession of his own individuality. Before his time the boundary between poetry and prose had not been clearly defined. His great merit lies not only in the ideal treatment with which he glorified common things and gilded them with a ray of enthusiasm, but far more in the ideal point of view which he first revealed to his countrymen. He at first sought for that remoteness, which is implied in

an escape from the realism of daily life, in the pastoral, — a kind of writing which, oddly enough, from its original intention as a protest in favor of naturalness, and of human as opposed to heroic sentiments, had degenerated into the most artificial of abstractions. But he was soon convinced of his error, and was not long in choosing between an unreality which pretended to be real and those everlasting realities of the mind which seem unreal only because they lie beyond the horizon of the every-day world, and become visible only when the mirage of fantasy lifts them up and hangs them in an ideal atmosphere. As in the old fairy-tales, the task which the age imposes on its poet is to weave its straw into a golden tissue; and when every device has failed, in comes the witch Imagination, and with a touch the miracle is achieved, simple as miracles always are after they are wrought.

Spenser, like Chaucer a Londoner, was born in 1553.[1] Nothing is known of his parents, except that the name of his mother was Elizabeth; but he was of gentle birth, as he more than once informs us, with the natural satisfaction of a poor man of genius at a time when the business talent of the middle class was opening to it the door of prosperous preferment. In 1569 he was entered

[1] Mr. Hales, in the excellent memoir of the poet prefixed to the Globe edition of his works, puts his birth a year earlier, on the strength of a line in the sixtieth sonnet. But it is not established that this sonnet was written in 1593, and even if it were, a sonnet is not upon oath, and the poet would prefer the round number forty, which suited the measure of his verse, to thirty-nine or forty-one, which might have been truer to the measure of his days.

as a sizar at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, and in due course took his bachelor's degree in 1573, and his master's in 1576. He is supposed, on insufficient grounds, as it appears to me, to have met with some disgust or disappointment during his residence at the University.[1] Between 1576 and 1578 Spenser seems to have been with some of his kinsfolk "in the North." It was during this interval that he conceived his fruitless passion for the Rosalinde, whose jilting him for another shepherd, whom he calls Menalcas, is somewhat perfunctorily bemoaned in his pastorals.[2] Before the

[1] This has been inferred from a passage in one of Gabriel Harvey's letters to him. But it would seem more natural, from the many allusions in Harvey's pamphlets against Nash, that it was his own wrongs which he had in mind, and his self-absorption would take it for granted that Spenser sympathized with him in all his grudges. Harvey is a remarkable instance of the refining influence of classical studies. Amid the pedantic farrago of his omni-sufficiency (to borrow one of his own words) we come suddenly upon passages whose gravity of sentiment, stateliness of movement, and purity of diction remind us of Landor. These lucid intervals in his overweening vanity explain and justify the friendship of Spenser. Yet the reiteration of emphasis with which he insists on all the world's knowing that Nash had called him an ass, probably gave Shakespeare the hint for one of the most comic touches in the character of Dogberry.

[2] The late Major C. G. Halpine, in a very interesting essay, makes it extremely probable that Rosalinde is the anagram of Rose Daniel, sister of the poet, and married to John Florio. He leaves little doubt, also, that the name of Spenser's wife (hitherto unknown) was Elizabeth Nagle. (See *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. ii. 674, November, 1858.) Mr. Halpine informed me that he found the substance of his essay among the papers of his father, the late Rev. N. J. Halpine, of Dublin. The latter published in the series of the Shakespeare Society a sprightly little tract entitled *Oberon*, which, if not quite convincing, is well worth reading for its ingenuity and research.

publication of his "Shepherd's Calendar" in 1579, he had made the acquaintance of Sir Philip Sidney, and was domiciled with him for a time at Penshurst, whether as guest or literary dependant is uncertain. In October, 1579, he is in the household of the Earl of Leicester. In July, 1580, he accompanied Lord Grey de Wilton to Ireland as Secretary, and in that country he spent the rest of his life, with occasional flying visits to England to publish poems or in search of preferment. His residence in that country has been compared to that of Ovid in Pontus. And, no doubt, there were certain outward points of likeness. The Irishry by whom he was surrounded were to the full as savage, as hostile, and as tenacious of their ancestral habitudes as the Scythians[1] who made Tomi a prison, and the descendants of the earlier English settlers had degenerated as much as the Mix-Hellenes who disgusted the Latin poet. Spenser himself looked on his life in Ireland as a banishment. In his "Colin Clout 's come Home again" he tells us that Sir Walter Raleigh, who visited him in 1589, and heard what was then finished of the "Faery Queen," —

> "'Gan to cast great liking to my lore
> And great disliking to my luckless lot,
> That banisht had myself, like wight forlore,
> Into that waste, where I was quite forgot.
> The which to leave thenceforth he counselled me,
> Unmeet for man in whom was aught regardful,
> And wend with him his Cynthia to see,
> Whose grace was great and bounty most rewardful."

[1] In his prose tract on Ireland, Spenser, perhaps with some memory of Ovid in his mind, derives the Irish mainly from the Scythians.

But Spenser was already living at Kilcolman Castle (which, with 3,028 acres of land from the forfeited estates of the Earl of Desmond, was confirmed to him by grant two years later), amid scenery at once placid and noble, whose varied charm he felt profoundly. He could not complain, with Ovid, —

> "Non liber hic ullus, non qui mihi commodet aurem,"

for he was within reach of a cultivated society, which gave him the stimulus of hearty admiration both as poet and scholar. Above all, he was fortunate in a seclusion that prompted study and deepened meditation, while it enabled him to converse with his genius disengaged from those worldly influences which would have disenchanted it of its mystic enthusiasm, if they did not muddle it ingloriously away. Surely this sequestered nest was more congenial to the brooding of those ethereal visions of the "Faery Queen" and to giving his "soul a loose" than

> "The smoke, the wealth, and noise of Rome,
> And all the busy pageantry
> That wise men scorn and fools adore."

Yet he longed for London, if not with the homesickness of Bussy-Rabutin in exile from the Parisian sun, yet enough to make him joyfully accompany Raleigh thither in the early winter of 1589, carrying with him the first three books of the great poem begun ten years before. Horace's *nonum prematur in annum* had been more than complied with, and the success was answerable to the well-

seasoned material and conscientious faithfulness of the work. But Spenser did not stay long in London to enjoy his fame. Seen close at hand, with its jealousies, intrigues, and selfish basenesses, the court had lost the enchantment lent by the distance of Kilcolman. A nature so prone to ideal contemplation as Spenser's would be profoundly shocked by seeing too closely the ignoble springs of contemporaneous policy, and learning by what paltry personal motives the noble opportunities of the world are at any given moment endangered. It is a sad discovery that history is so mainly made by ignoble men.

"Vide questo globo
Tal ch'ei sorrise del suo vil sembiante."

In his "Colin Clout," written just after his return to Ireland, he speaks of the court in a tone of contemptuous bitterness, in which, as it seems to me, there is more of the sorrow of disillusion than of the gall of personal disappointment. He speaks, so he tells us, —

"To warn young shepherds' wandering wit
Which, through report of that life's painted bliss,
Abandon quiet home to seek for it
And leave their lambs to loss misled amiss;
For, sooth to say, it is no sort of life
For shepherd fit to live in that same place,
Where each one seeks with malice and with strife
To thrust down other into foul disgrace
Himself to raise; and he doth soonest rise
That best can handle his deceitful wit
In subtle shifts . . .
To which him needs a guileful hollow heart
Maskëd with fair dissembling courtesy,
A filëd tongue furnisht with terms of art,

No art of school, but courtiers' schoolery.
For arts of school have there small countenance,
Counted but toys to busy idle brains,
And there professors find small maintenance,
But to be instruments of others' gains,
Nor is there place for any gentle wit
Unless to please it can itself apply.

. . . . . .

Even such is all their vaunted vanity,
Naught else but smoke that passeth soon away.

. . . . . .

So they themselves for praise of fools do sell,
And all their wealth for painting on a wall.

. . . . . .

Whiles single Truth and simple Honesty
Do wander up and down despised of all." [1]

And again in his "Mother Hubberd's Tale," in the most pithy and masculine verses he ever wrote: —

"Most miserable man, whom wicked Fate
Hath brought to Court to sue for *Had-I-wist*
That few have found and many one hath mist!
Full little knowest thou that hast not tried
What hell it is in suing long to bide;
To lose good days that might be better spent,
To waste long nights in pensive discontent,
To speed to-day, to be put back to-morrow,
To feed on hope, to pine with fear and sorrow,
To have thy prince's grace yet want her Peers',
To have thy asking yet wait many years,
To fret thy soul with crosses and with cares,
To eat thy heart through comfortless despairs,
To fawn, to crouch, to wait, to ride, to run,
To spend, to give, to want, to be undone.

. . . . . .

Whoever leaves sweet home, where mean estate
In safe assurance, without strife or hate,

[1] Compare Shakespeare's LXVI. Sonnet.

Finds all things needful for contentment meek,
And will to court for shadows vain to seek,
. . . . . .
That curse God send unto mine enemy!" [1]

When Spenser had once got safely back to the secure retreat and serene companionship of his great poem, with what profound and pathetic exultation must he have recalled the verses of Dante!

"Chi dietro a jura, e chi ad aforismi
Sen giva, e chi seguendo sacerdozio,
E chi regnar per forza e per sofismi,
E chi rubare, e chi civil negozio,
Chi nei diletti della carne involto
S' affaticava, e chi si dava all' ozio,
Quando da tutte queste cose sciolto,
Con Beatrice m' era suso in cielo
Cotanto gloriosamente accolto." [2]

What Spenser says of the indifference of the court to learning and literature is the more remarkable because he himself was by no means an unsuccessful suitor. Queen Elizabeth bestowed on him a pension of fifty pounds, and shortly after he received the grant of lands already mentioned. It is said, indeed, that Lord Burleigh in some way

[1] This poem, published in 1591, was, Spenser tells us in his dedication, "long sithens composed in the raw conceit of my youth." But he had evidently retouched it. The verses quoted show a firmer hand than is generally seen in it, and we are safe in assuming that they were added after his visit to England. Dr. Johnson epigrammatized Spenser's indictment into

"There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,
Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail,"

but I think it loses in pathos more than it gains in point.

[2] *Paradiso*, XI. 4–12. Spenser was familiar with the *Divina Commedia*, though I do not remember that his commentators have pointed out his chief obligations to it.

hindered the advancement of the poet, who more than once directly alludes to him either in reproach or remonstrance. In "The Ruins of Time," after speaking of the death of Walsingham,

> "Since whose decease learning lies unregarded,
> And men of armes do wander unrewarded,"

he gives the following reason for their neglect: —

> "For he that now wields all things at his will,
> Scorns th' one and th' other in his deeper skill.
> O grief of griefs! O gall of all good hearts,
> To see that virtue should despisëd be
> Of him that first was raised for virtuous parts,
> And now, broad-spreading like an aged tree,
> Lets none shoot up that nigh him planted be:
> O let the man of whom the Muse is scorned
> Nor live nor dead be of the Muse adorned!"

And in the introduction to the fourth book of the "Faery Queen," he says again: —

> "The rugged forehead that with grave foresight
> Wields kingdoms' causes and affairs of state,
> My looser rhymes, I wot, doth sharply wite
> For praising Love, as I have done of late, —
> . . . . . .
> By which frail youth is oft to folly led
> Through false allurement of that pleasing bait,
> That better were in virtues discipled
> Than with vain poems' weeds to have their fancies fed.
>
> "Such ones ill judge of love that cannot love
> Nor in their frozen hearts feel kindly flame;
> Forthy they ought not thing unknown reprove,
> Ne natural affection faultless blame
> For fault of few that have abused the same:
> For it of honor and all virtue is
> The root, and brings forth glorious flowers of fame
> That crown true lovers with immortal bliss,
> The meed of them that love and do not live amiss."

If Lord Burleigh could not relish such a dish of nightingales' tongues as the "Faery Queen," he is very much more to be pitied than Spenser. The sensitive purity of the poet might indeed well be wounded when a poem in which he proposed to himself "to discourse at large" of "the ethick part of Moral Philosophy" [1] could be so misinterpreted. But Spenser speaks in the same strain and without any other than a general application in his "Tears of the Muses," and his friend Sidney undertakes the defence of poesy because it was undervalued. But undervalued by whom? By the only persons about whom he knew or cared anything, those whom we should now call Society and who were then called the Court. The inference I would draw is that, among the causes which contributed to the marvellous efflorescence of genius in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the influence of direct patronage from above is to be reckoned at almost nothing.[2] Then, as when the same phenomenon

[1] His own words as reported by Lodowick Bryskett. (Todd's *Spenser*, I. lx.) The whole passage is very interesting as giving us the only glimpse we get of the living Spenser in actual contact with his fellow-men. It shows him to us, as we could wish to see him, surrounded with loving respect, companionable and helpful. Bryskett tells us that he was "perfect in the Greek tongue," and "also very well read in philosophy both moral and natural." He encouraged Bryskett in the study of Greek, and offered to help him in it. Comparing the last verse of the above citation of the *Faery Queen* with other passages in Spenser, I cannot help thinking that he wrote, "do not love amiss."

[2] "And know, sweet prince, when you shall come to know,
That 't is not in the power of kings to raise
A spirit for verse that is not born thereto;
Nor are they born in every prince's days."
Daniel's Dedic. Trag. of *Philotas*.

has happened elsewhere, there must have been a sympathetic public. Literature, properly so called, draws its sap from the deep soil of human nature's common and everlasting sympathies, the gathered leaf-mould of countless generations (οἵη περ φύλλων γενεή), and not from any top-dressing capriciously scattered over the surface at some master's bidding.[1] England had long been growing more truly insular in language and political ideas when the Reformation came to precipitate her national consciousness by secluding her more completely from the rest of Europe. Hitherto there had been Englishmen of a distinct type enough, honestly hating foreigners, and reigned over by kings of whom they were proud or not as the case might be, but there was no England as a separate entity from the sovereign who embodied it for the time being.[2] But now an English people began to be dimly aware of itself. Their having got a religion to themselves must have intensified them much as the having a god of their own did the Jews. The

[1] Louis XIV. is commonly supposed in some miraculous way to have created French literature. He may more truly be said to have petrified it so far as his influence went. The French *renaissance* in the preceding century was produced by causes similar in essentials to those which brought about that in England not long after. The *grand siècle* grew by natural processes of development out of that which had preceded it, and which, to the impartial foreigner at least, has more flavor, and more French flavor too, than the Gallo-Roman usurper that pushed it from its stool. The best modern French poetry has been forced to temper its verses in the colder natural springs of the ante-classic period.

[2] In the Elizabethan drama, the words "England" and "France" are constantly used to signify the kings of those countries.

exhilaration of relief after the long tension of anxiety, when the Spanish Armada was overwhelmed like the hosts of Pharaoh, while it confirmed their assurance of a provincial deity, must also have been like sunshine to bring into flower all that there was of imaginative or sentimental in the English nature, already just in the first flush of its spring.

> ("The yongë sonne
> Had in *the Bull* half of his course yronne.")

And just at this moment of blossoming every breeze was dusty with the golden pollen of Greece, Rome, and Italy. If Keats could say, when he first opened Chapman's Homer, —

> "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken;
> Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
> He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
> Looked at each other with a wild surmise,"

if Keats could say this, whose mind had been unconsciously fed with the results of this culture, — results that permeated all thought, all literature, and all talk, — fancy what must have been the awakening shock and impulse communicated to men's brains by the revelation of this new world of thought and fancy, an unveiling gradual yet sudden, like that of a great organ, which discovered to them what a wondrous instrument was in the soul of man with its epic and lyric stops, its deep thunders of tragedy and its passionate *vox humana!* It might almost seem as if Shakespeare had typified all this in Miranda, when she cries out at first sight of the king and his courtiers,

"O, wonder!
How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! O, brave new world
That hath such people in 't!"

The civil wars of the Roses had been a barren period in English literature, because they had been merely dynastic squabbles, in which no great principles were involved which could shake all minds with controversy and heat them to intense conviction. A conflict of opposing ambitions wears out the moral no less than the material forces of a people, but the ferment of hostile ideas and convictions may realize resources of character which before were only potential, may transform a merely gregarious multitude into a nation proud in its strength, sensible of the dignity and duty which strength involves, and groping after a common ideal. Some such transformation had been wrought or was going on in England. For the first time a distinct image of her was disengaging itself from the tangled blur of tradition and association in the minds of her children, and it was now only that her great poet could speak exultingly to an audience that would understand him with a passionate sympathy, of

"This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in a silver sea,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,
England, bound in with the triumphant sea!"

Such a period can hardly recur again, but something like it, something pointing back to similar producing causes, is observable in the revival of

English imaginative literature at the close of the last and in the early years of the present century. Again, after long fermentation, there was a war of principles, again the national consciousness was heightened and stung by a danger to the national existence, and again there was a crop of great poets and heroic men.

Spenser once more visited England, bringing with him three more books of the "Faery Queen," in 1595. He is supposed to have remained there during the two following years.[1] In 1594 he had been married to the lady celebrated in his somewhat artificial *amoretti*. By her he had four children. He was now at the height of his felicity; by universal acclaim the first poet of his age, and the one obstacle to his material advancement (if obstacle it was) had been put out of the way by the death of Lord Burleigh, August, 1598. In the next month he was recommended in a letter from Queen Elizabeth for the shrievalty of the county of Cork. But alas for Polycrates! In October the wild kerns and gallowglasses rose in no mood for sparing the house of Pindarus. They sacked and burned his castle, from which he with his wife and children barely escaped.[2] He sought shelter

[1] I say supposed, for the names of his two sons, Sylvanus and Peregrine, indicate that they were born in Ireland, and that Spenser continued to regard it as a wilderness and his abode there as exile. The two other children are added on the authority of a pedigree drawn up by Sir W. Betham and cited in Mr. Hales's *Life of Spenser* prefixed to the Globe edition.

[2] Ben Jonson told Drummond that one child perished in the flames. But he was speaking after an interval of twenty-one

in London, and died there on the 16th January, 1599, at a tavern in King Street, Westminster. He was buried in the neighboring Abbey next to Chaucer, at the cost of the Earl of Essex, poets bearing his pall and casting verses into his grave. He died poor, but not in want. On the whole, his life may be reckoned a happy one, as in the main the lives of the great poets must have commonly been. If they feel more passionately the pang of the moment, so also the compensations are incalculable, and not the least of them this very capacity of passionate emotion. The real good fortune is to be measured, not by more or less of outward pros-

years, and, of course, from hearsay. Spenser's misery was exaggerated by succeeding poets, who used him to point a moral, and from the shelter of his tomb launched many a shaft of sarcasm at an unappreciative public. Giles Fletcher in his *Purple Island* (a poem which reminds us of the *Faery Queen* by the supreme tediousness of its allegory, but in nothing else) set the example in the best verse he ever wrote: —

" Poorly, poor man, he lived; poorly, poor man, he died."

Gradually this poetical tradition established itself firmly as authentic history. Spenser could never have been poor, except by comparison. The whole story of his later days has a strong savor of legend. He must have had ample warning of Tyrone's rebellion, and would probably have sent away his wife and children to Cork, if he did not go thither himself. I am inclined to think that he did, carrying his papers with him, and among them the two cantos of *Mutability*, first published in 1611. These, it is most likely, were the only ones he ever completed, for, with all his abundance, he was evidently a laborious finisher. When we remember that ten years were given to the elaboration of the first three books, and that five more elapsed before the next three were ready, we shall waste no vain regrets on the six concluding books supposed to have been lost by the carelessness of an imaginary servant on their way from Ireland.

perity, but by the opportunity given for the development and free play of the genius. It should be remembered that the power of expression which exaggerates their griefs is also no inconsiderable consolation for them. We should measure what Spenser says of his worldly disappointments by the bitterness of the unavailing tears he shed for Rosalinde. A careful analysis of these leaves no perceptible residuum of salt, and we are tempted to believe that the passion itself was not much more real than the pastoral accessories of pipe and crook. I very much doubt whether Spenser ever felt more than one profound passion in his life, and that luckily was for his "Faery Queen." He was fortunate in the friendship of the best men and women of his time, in the seclusion which made him free of the still better society of the past, in the loving recognition of his countrymen. All that we know of him is amiable and of good report. He was faithful to the friendships of his youth, pure in his loves, unspotted in his life. Above all, the ideal with him was not a thing apart and unattainable, but the sweetener and ennobler of the street and the fireside.

There are two ways of measuring a poet, either by an absolute æsthetic standard, or relatively to his position in the literary history of his country and the conditions of his generation. Both should be borne in mind as coefficients in a perfectly fair judgment. If his positive merit is to be settled irrevocably by the former, yet an intelligent criticism will find its advantage not only in considering what

he was, but what, under the given circumstances, it was possible for him to be.

The fact that the great poem of Spenser was inspired by the Orlando of Ariosto, and written in avowed emulation of it, and that the poet almost always needs to have his fancy set agoing by the hint of some predecessor, must not lead us to overlook his manifest claim to originality. It is not what a poet takes, but what he makes out of what he has taken, that shows what native force is in him. Above all, did his mind dwell complacently in those forms and fashions which in their very birth are already obsolescent, or was it instinctively drawn to those qualities which are permanent in language and whatever is wrought in it? There is much in Spenser that is contemporary and evanescent; but the substance of him is durable, and his work was the deliberate result of intelligent purpose and ample culture. The publication of his "Shepherd's Calendar" in 1579 (though the poem itself be of little interest) is one of the epochs in our literature. Spenser had at least the originality to see clearly and to feel keenly that it was essential to bring poetry back again to some kind of understanding with nature. His immediate predecessors seem to have conceived of it as a kind of bird of paradise, born to float somewhere between heaven and earth, with no very well defined relation to either. It is true that the nearest approach they were able to make to this airy ideal was a shuttlecock, winged with a bright plume or so from Italy, but, after all, nothing but cork and

feathers, which they bandied back and forth from one stanza to another, with the useful ambition of *keeping it up* as long as they could. To my mind the old comedy of "Gammer Gurton's Needle" is worth the whole of them. It may be coarse, earthy, but in reading it one feels that he is at least a man among men, and not a humbug among humbugs.

The form of Spenser's "Shepherd's Calendar," it is true, is artificial, absurdly so if you look at it merely from the outside, — not, perhaps, the wisest way to look at anything, unless it be a jail or a volume of the "Congressional Globe," — but the spirit of it is fresh and original. We have at last got over the superstition that shepherds and shepherdesses are any wiser or simpler than other people. We know that wisdom can be won only by wide commerce with men and books, and that simplicity, whether of manners or style, is the crowning result of the highest culture. But the pastorals of Spenser were very different things, different both in the moving spirit and the resultant form from the later ones of Browne or the "Piscatory Eclogues" of Phinehas Fletcher. And why? Browne and Fletcher wrote because Spenser had written, but Spenser wrote from a strong inward impulse — an instinct it might be called — to escape at all risks into the fresh air from that horrible atmosphere into which rhymer after rhymer had been pumping carbonic-acid gas with the full force of his lungs, and in which all sincerity was on the edge of suffocation. His longing for something truer and better was as

honest as that which led Tacitus so long before to idealize the Germans, and Rousseau so long after to make an angel of the savage.

Spenser himself supremely overlooks the whole chasm between himself and Chaucer, as Dante between himself and Virgil. He called Chaucer master, as Milton was afterwards to call *him*. And, even while he chose the most artificial of all forms, his aim — that of getting back to nature and life — was conscious, I have no doubt, to himself, and must be obvious to whoever reads with anything but the ends of his fingers. It is true that Sannazzaro had brought the pastoral into fashion again, and that two of Spenser's are little more than translations from Marot; but for manner he instinctively turned back to Chaucer, the first and then only great English poet. He has given common instead of classic names to his personages, for characters they can hardly be called. Above all, he has gone to the provincial dialects for words wherewith to enlarge and freshen his poetical vocabulary.[1] I look upon the "Shepherd's Calen-

[1] Sir Philip Sidney did not approve of this. "That same framing of his style to an old rustic language I dare not allow, since neither Theocritus in Greek, Virgil in Latin, nor Sannazzaro in Italian did affect it." (*Defence of Poesy.*) Ben Jonson, on the other hand, said that Guarini "kept not decorum in making shepherds speak as well as himself could." (*Conversations with Drummond.*) I think Sidney was right, for the poets' Arcadia is a purely ideal world, and should be treated accordingly. But whoever looks into the glossary appended to the *Calendar* by E. K., will be satisfied that Spenser's object was to find unhackneyed and poetical words rather than such as should seem more on a level with the speakers. See also the *Epistle Dedicatory*. I cannot help thinking that E. K. was Spenser himself, with occa-

dar" as being no less a conscious and deliberate attempt at reform than Thomson's "Seasons" were in the topics, and Wordsworth's "Lyrical Ballads" in the language of poetry. But the great merit of these pastorals was not so much in their matter as their manner. They show a sense of style in its larger meaning hitherto displayed by no English poet since Chaucer. Surrey had brought back from Italy a certain inkling of it, so far as it is contained in decorum. But here was a new language, a choice and arrangement of words, a variety, elasticity, and harmony of verse most grateful to the ears of men. If not passion, there was fervor, which was perhaps as near it as the somewhat stately movement of Spenser's mind would allow him to come. Sidney had tried many experiments in versification, which are curious and interesting, especially his attempts to naturalize the *sliding* rhymes of Sannazzaro in English. But there is everywhere the uncertainty of a 'prentice hand. Spenser shows himself already a master, at least in verse, and we can trace the studies of Milton, a yet greater master, in the "Shepherd's Calendar" as well as in the "Faery Queen." We have seen that Spenser, under the misleading influence of Sidney [1] and Harvey, tried his hand at English hexameters. But his great glory is that he taught his own language to sing and move to measures harmonious and noble. Chaucer had

sional interjections of Harvey. Who else could have written such English as many passages in this Epistle?

[1] It was at Penshurst that he wrote the only specimen that has come down to us, and bad enough it is. I have said that some of Sidney's are pleasing.

done much to vocalize it, as I have tried to show elsewhere,[1] but Spenser was to prove

> "That no tongue hath the muse's utterance heired
> For verse, and that sweet music to the ear
> Struck out of rhyme, so naturally as this."

The "Shepherd's Calendar" contains perhaps the most picturesquely imaginative verse which Spenser has written. It is in the eclogue for February, where he tells us of the

> "Faded oak
> Whose body is sere, whose branches broke,
> Whose naked arms stretch unto the fire."

It is one of those verses that Joseph Warton would have liked in secret, that Dr. Johnson would have proved to be untranslatable into reasonable prose, and which the imagination welcomes at once without caring whether it be exactly conformable to *barbara* or *celarent*. Another pretty verse in the same eclogue,

> "But gently took that ungently came,"

pleased Coleridge so greatly that he thought it was his own. But in general it is not so much the sentiments and images that are new as the modulation of the verses in which they float. The cold obstruction of two centuries thaws, and the stream of speech once more let loose, seeks out its old windings, or overflows musically in unpractised channels. The service which Spenser did to our literature by this exquisite sense of harmony is incalculable. His fine ear, abhorrent of barbarous dissonance, his dainty tongue that loves to prolong

[1] See *Literary Essays*, iii. 338 *seqq.*

the relish of a musical phrase, made possible the transition from the cast-iron stiffness of "Ferrex and Porrex" to the Damascus pliancy of Fletcher and Shakespeare. It was he that

> "Taught the dumb on high to sing,
> And heavy ignorance aloft to fly:
> That added feathers to the learned's wing,
> And gave to grace a double majesty."

I do not mean that in the "Shepherd's Calendar" he had already achieved that transmutation of language and metre by which he was afterwards to endow English verse with the most varied and majestic of stanzas, in which the droning old alexandrine, awakened for the first time to a feeling of the poetry that was in him, was to wonder, like M. Jourdain, that he had been talking prose all his life, — but already he gave clear indications of the tendency and premonitions of the power which were to carry it forward to ultimate perfection. A harmony and alacrity of language like this were unexampled in English verse: —

> "Ye dainty nymphs, that in this blessed brook
> Do bathe your breast,
> Forsake your watery bowers and hither look
> At my request. . . .
> And eke you virgins that on Parnass dwell,
> Whence floweth Helicon, the learned well,
> Help me to blaze
> Her worthy praise,
> Which in her sex doth all excel."

Here we have the natural gait of the measure, somewhat formal and slow, as befits an invocation, and now mark how the same feet shall be made to quicken their pace at the bidding of the tune: —

"Bring here the pink and purple columbine,
With gilliflowers;
Bring coronations and sops in wine,
Worne of paramours;
Strow me the ground with daffadowndillies,
And cowslips and kingcúps and lovëd lilies;
The pretty paunce
And the chevisance
Shall match with the fair flowërdelice." [1]

The argument prefixed by E. K. to the tenth Eclogue has a special interest for us as showing how high a conception Spenser had of poetry and the poet's office. By Cuddy he evidently means himself, though choosing out of modesty another

[1] Of course *dillies* and *lilies* must be read with a slight accentuation of the last syllable (permissible then), in order to chime with *delice*. In the first line I have put *here* instead of *hether*, which (like other words where *th* comes between two vowels) was then very often a monosyllable, in order to throw the accent back more strongly on *bring*, where it belongs. Spenser's innovation lies in making his verses by ear instead of on the finger-tips, and in valuing the stave more than any of the single verses that compose it. This is the secret of his easy superiority to all others in the stanza which he composed, and which bears his name. Milton (who got more of his schooling in these matters from Spenser than anywhere else) gave this principle a greater range, and applied it with more various mastery. I have little doubt that the tune of the last stanza cited above was clinging in Shakespeare's ear when he wrote those exquisite verses in *Midsummer Night's Dream* ("I know a bank"), where our grave pentameter is in like manner surprised into a lyrical movement. See also the pretty song in the eclogue for August. Ben Jonson, too, evidently caught some cadences from Spenser for his lyrics. I need hardly say that in those eclogues (May, for example) where Spenser thought he was imitating what wiseacres used to call the *riding-rhyme* of Chaucer, he fails most lamentably. He had evidently learned to scan his master's verses better when he wrote his *Mother Hubberd's Tale*.

name instead of the familiar Colin. "In Cuddy is set forth the perfect pattern of a Poet, which, finding no maintenance of his state and studies, complaineth of the contempt of Poetry and the causes thereof, specially having been in all ages, and even amongst the most barbarous, always of singular account and honor, *and being indeed so worthy and commendable an art, or rather no art, but a divine gift and heavenly instinct not to be gotten by labor and learning, but adorned with both, and poured into the wit by a certain Enthousiasmos and celestial inspiration*, as the author hereof elsewhere at large discourseth in his book called THE ENGLISH POET, which book being lately come into my hands, I mind also by God's grace, upon further advisement, to publish." E. K., whoever he was, never carried out his intention, and the book is no doubt lost; a loss to be borne with less equanimity than that of Cicero's treatise *De Gloria*, once possessed by Petrarch. The passage I have italicized is most likely an extract, and reminds one of the long-breathed periods of Milton. Drummond of Hawthornden tells us, "he [Ben Jonson] hath by heart some verses of Spenser's 'Calendar,' about wine, between Coline and Percye" (Cuddie and Piers).[1] These verses are in this eclogue, and are worth quoting both as having the approval of dear old Ben, the best critic of the day, and because they are a good sample of Spenser's earlier verse: —

[1] Drummond, it will be remarked, speaking from memory, takes Cuddy to be Colin. In Milton's *Lycidas* there are reminiscences

"Thou kenst not, Percie, how the rhyme should rage;
O, if my temples were distained with wine,
And girt in garlands of wild ivy-twine,
How I could rear the Muse on stately stage
And teach her tread aloft in buskin fine
With quaint Bellona in her equipage!"

In this eclogue he gives hints of that spacious style which was to distinguish him, and which, like his own Fame,

"With golden wings aloft doth fly
Above the reach of ruinous decay,
And with brave plumes doth beat the azure sky,
Admired of base-born men from far away."[1]

He was letting his wings grow, as Milton said, and foreboding the "Faery Queen": —

of this eclogue as well as of that for May. The latter are the more evident, but I think that Spenser's

"Cuddie, the praise is better than the price,"

suggested Milton's

"But not the praise,
Phœbus replied, and touched my trembling ears."

Shakespeare had read and remembered this pastoral. Compare

"But, ah, Mæcenas is yclad in clay,
And great Augustus long ago is dead,
And all the worthies liggen wrapt in lead,"

with

"King Pandion, he is dead;
All thy friends are lapt in lead."

It is odd that Shakespeare, in his "*l*apt in *l*ead," is more Spenserian than Spenser himself, from whom he caught this "hunting of the letter."

[1] *Ruins of Time.* It is perhaps not considering too nicely to remark how often this image of *wings* recurred to Spenser's mind. A certain aerial latitude was essential to the large circlings of his style.

"Lift thyself up out of the lowly dust

. . . . . .

To 'doubted knights whose woundless armor rusts
And helms unbruisèd waxen daily brown:
There may thy Muse display her fluttering wing,
And stretch herself at large from East to West."

Verses like these, especially the last (which Dryden would have liked), were such as English ears had not yet heard, and curiously prophetic of the maturer man. The language and verse of Spenser at his best have an ideal lift in them, and there is scarce any of our poets who can so hardly help being poetical.

It was this instantly felt if not easily definable charm that forthwith won for Spenser his never-disputed rank as the chief English poet of that age, and gave him a popularity which, during his life and in the following generation, was, in its select quality, without a competitor. It may be thought that I lay too much stress on this single attribute of diction. But apart from its importance in his case as showing their way to the poets who were just then learning the accidence of their art, and leaving them a material to work in already mellowed to their hands, it should be remembered that it is subtle perfection of phrase and that happy coalescence of music and meaning, where each reinforces the other, that define a man as poet and make all ears converts and partisans. Spenser was an epicure in language. He loved "seld-seen costly" words perhaps too well, and did not always distinguish between mere strangeness and that novelty which is so agreeable as to cheat us with some

charm of seeming association. He had not the concentrated power which can sometimes pack infinite riches in the little room of a single epithet, for his genius is rather for dilation than compression.[1] But he was, with the exception of Milton and possibly Gray, the most learned of our poets. His familiarity with ancient and modern literature was easy and intimate, and as he perfected himself in his art, he caught the grand manner and high-bred ways of the society he frequented. But even to the last he did not quite shake off the blunt rusticity of phrase that was habitual with the generation that preceded him. In the fifth book of the "Faery Queen," where he is describing the passion of Britomart at the supposed infidelity of Arthegall, he descends to a Teniers-like realism,[2] — he

[1] Perhaps his most striking single epithet is the "sea-shouldering whales," B. II. 12, xxiii. His ear seems to delight in prolongations. For example, he makes such words as *glorious*, *gratious*, *joyeous*, *havior*, *chapelet* dactyles, and that, not at the end of verses, where it would not have been unusual, but in the first half of them. Milton contrives a break (a kind of heave, as it were) in the uniformity of his verse by a practice exactly the opposite of this. He also shuns a *hiatus* which does not seem to have been generally displeasing to Spenser's ear, though perhaps in the compound epithet *bees-alluring* he intentionally avoids it by the plural form.

[2] "Like as a wayward child, whose sounder sleep
Is broken with some fearful dream's affright,
With froward will doth set himself to weep
Ne can be stilled for all his nurse's might,
But kicks and squalls and shrieks for fell despight,
Now scratching her and her loose locks misusing,
Now seeking darkness and now seeking light,
Then craving suck, and then the suck refusing."

He would doubtless have justified himself by the familiar

whose verses generally remind us of the dancing Hours of Guido, where we catch but a glimpse of the real earth and that far away beneath. But his habitual style is that of gracious loftiness and refined luxury.

He first shows his mature hand in the "Muiopotmos," the most airily fanciful of his poems, a marvel for delicate conception and treatment, whose breezy verse seems to float between a blue sky and golden earth in imperishable sunshine. No other English poet has found the variety and compass which enlivened the octave stanza under his sensitive touch. It can hardly be doubted that in Clarion the butterfly he has symbolized himself, and surely never was the poetic temperament so picturesquely exemplified: —

"Over the fields, in his frank lustiness,
And all the champaign o'er, he soarëd light,
And all the country wide he did possess,
Feeding upon their pleasures bounteously,
That none gainsaid and none did him envy.

"The woods, the rivers, and the meadows green,
With his air-cutting wings he measured wide,
Nor did he leave the mountains bare unseen,
Nor the rank grassy fens' delights untried;
But none of these, however sweet they been,
Mote please his fancy, or him cause to abide;
His choiceful sense with every change doth flit;
No common things may please a wavering wit.

example of Homer's comparing Ajax to a donkey in the eleventh book of the Iliad. So also in the *Epithalamion* it grates our nerves to hear,

"Pour not by cups, but by the bellyful,
Pour out to all that wull."

Such examples serve to show how strong a dose of Spenser's *aurum potabile* the language needed.

"To the gay gardens his unstaid desire
Him wholly carried, to refresh his sprights;
There lavish Nature, in her best attire,
Pours forth sweet odors and alluring sights,
And Art, with her contending doth aspire,
To excel the natural with made delights;
And all that fair or pleasant may be found,
In riotous excess doth there abound.

"There he arriving, round about doth flie,
From bed to bed, from one to the other border,
And takes survey with curious busy eye,
Of every flower and herb there set in order,
Now this, now that, he tasteth tenderly,
Yet none of them he rudely doth disorder,
Ne with his feet their silken leaves displace,
But pastures on the pleasures of each place.

"And evermore with most variety
And change of sweetness (for all change is sweet)
He casts his glutton sense to satisfy,
Now sucking of the sap of herbs most meet,
Or of the dew which yet on them doth lie,
Now in the same bathing his tender feet;
And then he percheth on some branch thereby
To weather him and his moist wings to dry.

"And then again he turneth to his play,
To spoil [plunder] the pleasures of that paradise;
The wholesome sage, the lavender still gray,
Rank-smelling rue, and cummin good for eyes,
The roses reigning in the pride of May,
Sharp hyssop good for green wounds' remedies,
Fair marigolds, and bees-alluring thyme,
Sweet marjoram and daisies decking prime,

"Cool violets, and orpine growing still,
Embathëd balm, and cheerful galingale,
Fresh costmary and breathful camomill,
Dull poppy and drink-quickening setuale,
Vein-healing vervain and head-purging dill,

Sound savory, and basil hearty-hale,
Fat coleworts and comforting perseline,
Cold lettuce, and refreshing rosemarine.[1]

"And whatso else of virtue good or ill,
Grew in this garden, fetched from far away,
Of every one he takes and tastes at will,
And on their pleasures greedily doth prey;
Then, when he hath both played and fed his fill,
In the warm sun he doth himself embay,
And there him rests in riotous suffisance
Of all his gladfulness and kingly joyance.

"What more felicity can fall to creature
Than to enjoy delight with liberty,
And to be lord of all the works of nature?
To reign in the air from earth to highest sky,
To feed on flowers and weeds of glorious feature,
To take whatever thing doth please the eye?
Who rests not pleasëd with such happiness,
Well worthy he to taste of wretchedness."

The "Muiopotmos" pleases us all the more that it vibrates in us a string of classical association by adding an episode to Ovid's story of Arachne. "Talking the other day with a friend (the late Mr. Keats) about Dante, he observed that whenever so great a poet told us anything in addition or continuation of an ancient story, he had a right to be regarded as classical authority. For instance, said he, when he tells us of that characteristic death of Ulysses, . . . we ought to receive the in-

[1] I could not bring myself to root out this odorous herb-garden, though it make my extract too long. It is a pretty reminiscence of his master Chaucer, but is also very characteristic of Spenser himself. He could not help planting a flower or two among his serviceable plants, and after all this abundance he is not satisfied, but begins the next stanza with "And whatso *else*."

formation as authentic, and be glad that we have more news of Ulysses than we looked for." [1] We can hardly doubt that Ovid would have been glad to admit this exquisitely fantastic illumination into his margin.

No German analyzer of æsthetics has given us so convincing a definition of the artistic nature as these radiant verses. "To reign in the air" was certainly Spenser's function. And yet the commentators, who seem never willing to let their poet be a poet pure and simple, though, had he not been so, they would have lost their only hold upon life, try to make out from his "Mother Hubberd's Tale" that he might have been a very sensible matter-of-fact man if he would. For my own part, I am quite willing to confess that I like him none the worse for being *un*practical, and that my reading has convinced me that being too poetical is the rarest fault of poets. Practical men are not so scarce, one would think, and I am not sure that the tree was a gainer when the hamadryad flitted and left it nothing but ship-timber. Such men as Spenser are not sent into the world to be part of its motive power. The blind old engine would not know the difference though we got up its steam with attar of roses, nor make one revolution more to the minute for it. What practical man ever left such an heirloom to his countrymen as the "Faery Queen"?

Undoubtedly Spenser wished to be useful and in the highest vocation of all, that of teacher, and

[1] Leigh Hunt's *Indicator*, XVII.

Milton calls him "our sage and serious poet, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas." And good Dr. Henry More was of the same mind. I fear he makes his vices so beautiful now and then that we should not be very much afraid of them if we chanced to meet them; for he could not escape from his genius, which, if it led him as philosopher to the abstract contemplation of the beautiful, left him as poet open to every impression of sensuous delight. When he wrote the "Shepherd's Calendar" he was certainly a Puritan, and probably so by conviction rather than from any social influences or thought of personal interests. There is a verse, it is true, in the second of the two detached cantos of "Mutability,"

"Like that ungracious crew which feigns demurest grace,"

which is supposed to glance at the straiter religionists, and from which it has been inferred that he drew away from them as he grew older. It is very likely that years and widened experience of men may have produced in him their natural result of tolerant wisdom which revolts at the hasty destructiveness of inconsiderate zeal. But with the more generous side of Puritanism I think he sympathized to the last. His rebukes of clerical worldliness are in the Puritan tone, and as severe a one as any is in "Mother Hubberd's Tale," published in 1591.[1] There is an iconoclastic relish in his

[1] Ben Jonson told Drummond "that in that paper Sir W. Raleigh had of the allegories of his *Faery Queen*, by the Blatant Beast the Puritans were understood." But this is certainly wrong. There were very different shades of Puritanism, according to in-

account of Sir Guyon's demolishing the Bower of Bliss that makes us think he would not have regretted the plundered abbeys as perhaps Shakespeare did when he speaks of the winter woods as "bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang": —

> "But all those pleasant bowers and palace brave
> Guyon broke down with rigor pitiless,
> Ne ought their goodly workmanship might save
> Them from the tempest of his wrathfulness,
> But that their bliss he turned to balefulness;
> Their groves he felled, their gardens did deface,
> Their arbors spoil, their cabinets suppress,
> Their banquet-houses burn, their buildings rase,
> And of the fairest late now made the foulest place."

But whatever may have been Spenser's religious opinions (which do not nearly concern us here), the bent of his mind was toward a Platonic mysticism, a supramundane sphere where it could shape universal forms out of the primal elements of things, instead of being forced to put up with their fortuitous combinations in the unwilling material of mortal clay. He who, when his singing robes were on, could never be tempted nearer to the real world than under some subterfuge of pastoral or allegory, expatiates joyously in this untrammelled ether: —

dividual temperament. That of Winthrop and Higginson had a mellowness of which Endicott and Standish were incapable. The gradual change of Milton's opinions was similar to that which I suppose in Spenser. The passage in *Mother Hubberd* may have been aimed at the Protestant clergy of Ireland (for he says much the same thing in his *View of the State of Ireland*), but it is general in its terms.

" Lifting himself out of the lowly dust
On golden plumes up to the purest sky."

Nowhere does his genius soar and sing with such continuous aspiration, nowhere is his phrase so decorously stately, though rising to an enthusiasm which reaches intensity while it stops short of vehemence, as in his Hymns to Love and Beauty, especially the latter. There is an exulting spurn of earth in it, as of a soul just loosed from its cage. I shall make no extracts from it, for it is one of those intimately coherent and transcendentally logical poems that "moveth altogether if it move at all," the breaking off a fragment from which would maim it as it would a perfect group of crystals. Whatever there is of sentiment and passion is for the most part purely disembodied and without sex, like that of angels, — a kind of poetry which has of late gone out of fashion, whether to our gain or not may be questioned. Perhaps one may venture to hint that the animal instincts are those that stand in least need of stimulation. Spenser's notions of love were so nobly pure, so far from those of our common ancestor who could hang by his tail, as not to disqualify him for achieving the quest of the Holy Grail, and accordingly it is not uninstructive to remember that he had drunk, among others, at French sources not yet deboshed with *absinthe*.[1]

[1] Two of his eclogues, as I have said, are from Marot, and his earliest known verses are translations from Bellay, a poet who was charming whenever he had the courage to play truant from a bad school. We must not suppose that an analysis of the literature of the *demi-monde* will give us all the elements of the French character. It has been both grave and profound; nay, it has even

Yet, with a purity like that of thrice-bolted snow, he had none of its coldness. He is, of all our poets, the most truly sensuous, using the word as Milton probably meant it when he said that poetry should be "simple, sensuous, and passionate." A poet is innocently sensuous when his mind permeates and illumines his senses; when they, on the other hand, muddy the mind, he becomes sensual. Every one of Spenser's senses was as exquisitely alive to the impressions of material, as every organ of his soul was to those of spiritual beauty. Accordingly, if he painted the weeds of sensuality at all, he could not help making them "of glorious feature." It was this, it may be suspected, rather than his "praising love," that made Lord Burleigh shake his "rugged forehead." Spenser's gamut, indeed, is a wide one, ranging from a purely corporeal delight in "precious odors fetched from far away" upward to such refinement as

> "Upon her eyelids many graces sate
> Under the shadow of her even brows,"

where the eye shares its pleasure with the mind. He is court-painter in ordinary to each of the senses in turn, and idealizes these frail favorites of his majesty King Lusty Juventus, till they half believe themselves the innocent shepherdesses into which he travesties them.[1]

contrived to be wise and lively at the same time, a combination so incomprehensible by the Teutonic races that they have labelled it levity. It puts them out as Nature did Fuseli.

[1] Taste must be partially excepted. It is remarkable how little eating and drinking there is in the *Faery Queen*. The only time he fairly sets a table is in the house of Malbecco, where it is

In his great poem he had two objects in view: first, the ephemeral one of pleasing the court, and then that of recommending himself to the permanent approval of his own and following ages as a poet, and especially as a moral poet. To meet the first demand, he lays the scene of his poem in contemporary England, and brings in all the leading personages of the day under the thin disguise of his knights and their squires and lady-loves. He says this expressly in the prologue to the second book: —

> "Of Faery Land yet if he more inquire,
> By certain signs, here set in sundry place,
> He may it find; . . .
> And thou, O fairest princess under sky,
> In this fair mirror mayst behold thy face
> And thine own realms in land of Faery."

Many of his personages we can still identify, and all of them were once as easily recognizable as those of Mademoiselle de Scudéry. This, no doubt, added greatly to the immediate piquancy of the allusions. The interest they would excite may be inferred from the fact that King James, in 1596, wished to have the author prosecuted and punished

necessary to the conduct of the story. Yet taste is not wholly forgotten: —

> "In her left hand a cup of gold she held,
> And with her right the riper fruit did reach,
> Whose sappy liquor, that with fulness sweld,
> Into her cup she scruzed with dainty breach
> Of her fine fingers without foul impeach,
> That so fair wine-press made the wine more sweet."
> (B. II. c. xii. 56.)

Taste can hardly complain of unhandsome treatment!

for his indecent handling of his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, under the name of Duessa.[1] To suit the wider application of his plan's other and more important half, Spenser made all his characters double their parts, and appear in his allegory as the impersonations of abstract moral qualities. When the cardinal and theological virtues tell Dante,

> "Noi siam qui ninfe e in ciel siamo stelle,"

the sweetness of the verse enables the fancy, by a slight gulp, to swallow without solution the problem of being in two places at the same time. But there is something fairly ludicrous in such a duality as that of Prince Arthur and the Earl of Leicester, Arthegall and Lord Grey, and Belphœbe and Elizabeth.

> "In this same interlude it doth befall
> That I, one Snout by name, present a wall."

The reality seems to heighten the improbability, already hard enough to manage. But Spenser had fortunately almost as little sense of humor as

[1] Had the poet lived longer, he might perhaps have verified his friend Raleigh's saying, that "whosoever in writing modern history shall follow truth too near the heels, it may haply strike out his teeth." The passage is one of the very few disgusting ones in the *Faery Queen*. Spenser was copying Ariosto; but the Italian poet, with the discreeter taste of his race, keeps to generalities. Spenser goes into particulars which can only be called nasty. He did this, no doubt, to pleasure his mistress, Mary's rival; and this gives us a measure of the brutal coarseness of contemporary manners. It becomes only the more marvellous that the fine flower of his genius could have transmuted the juices of such a soil into the purity and sweetness which are its own peculiar properties.

Wordsworth,[1] or he could never have carried his poem on with enthusiastic good faith so far as he did. It is evident that to him the Land of Faery was an unreal world of picture and illusion,

> "The world's sweet inn from pain and wearisome turmoil,"

in which he could shut himself up from the actual, with its shortcomings and failures.

> "The ways through which my weary steps I guide
> In this delightful land of Faery
> Are so exceeding spacious and wide,
> And sprinkled with such sweet variety
> Of all that pleasant is to ear and eye,
> That I, nigh ravisht with rare thoughts' delight,
> My tedious travail do forget thereby,
> And, when I 'gin to feel decay of might,
> It strength to me supplies, and cheers my dullëd spright."

Spenser seems here to confess a little weariness; but the alacrity of his mind is so great that, even where his invention fails a little, we do not share his feeling nor suspect it, charmed as we are by the variety and sweep of his measure, the beauty or vigor of his similes, the musical felicity of his diction, and the mellow versatility of his pictures. In this last quality Ariosto, whose emulous pupil he was, is as Bologna to Venice in the comparison. That, when the personal allusions have lost their meaning and the allegory has become a burden, the

[1] There is a gleam of humor in one of the couplets of *Mother Hubberd's Tale*, where the Fox, persuading the Ape that they should disguise themselves as discharged soldiers in order to beg the more successfully, says, —

> "Be you the soldier, for you likest are
> For manly semblance *and small skill in war*."

book should continue to be read with delight, is proof enough, were any wanting, how full of life and light and the other-worldliness of poetry it must be. As a narrative it has, I think, every fault of which that kind of writing is capable. The characters are vague, and, even were they not, they drop out of the story so often and remain out of it so long, that we have forgotten who they are when we meet them again; the episodes hinder the advance of the action instead of relieving it with variety of incident or novelty of situation; the plot, if plot it may be called,

> "That shape has none
> Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,"

recalls drearily our ancient enemy, the Metrical Romance; while the fighting, which in those old poems was tediously sincere, is between shadow and shadow, where we know that neither can harm the other, though we are tempted to wish he might. Hazlitt bids us not mind the allegory, and says that it won't bite us nor meddle with us if we do not meddle with it. But how if it bore us, which after all is the fatal question? The truth is that it is too often forced upon us against our will, as people were formerly driven to church till they began to look on a day of rest as a penal institution, and to transfer to the Scriptures that suspicion of defective inspiration which was awakened in them by the preaching. The true type of the allegory is the Odyssey, which we read without suspicion as pure poem, and then find a new pleasure in divining its double meaning, as if we somehow got a

better bargain of our author than he meant to give us. But this complex feeling must not be so exacting as to prevent our lapsing into the old Arabian Nights simplicity of interest again. The moral of a poem should be suggested, as when in some mediæval church we cast down our eyes to muse over a fresco of Giotto, and are reminded of the transitoriness of life by the mortuary tablets under our feet. The vast superiority of Bunyan over Spenser lies in the fact that we help make his allegory out of our own experience. Instead of striving to embody abstract passions and temptations, he has given us his own in all their pathetic simplicity. He is the Ulysses of his own prose-epic. This is the secret of his power and his charm, that, while the representation of what *may* happen to all men comes home to none of us in particular, the story of any one man's real experience finds its startling parallel in that of every one of us. The very homeliness of Bunyan's names and the everydayness of his scenery, too, put us off our guard, and we soon find ourselves on as easy a footing with his allegorical beings as we might be with Adam or Socrates in a dream. Indeed, he has prepared us for such incongruities by telling us at setting out that the story was of a dream. The long nights of Bedford jail had so intensified his imagination, and made the figures with which it peopled his solitude so real to him, that the creatures of his mind become *things*, as clear to the memory as if we had seen them. But Spenser's are too often mere names, with no bodies to back them, entered

on the Muses' muster-roll by the specious trick of personification. There is, likewise, in Bunyan, a childlike simplicity and taking-for-granted which win our confidence. His Giant Despair,[1] for example, is by no means the Ossianic figure into which artists who mistake the vague for the sublime have misconceived it. He is the ogre of the fairy-tales, with his malicious wife; and he comes forth to us from those regions of early faith and wonder as something beforehand accepted by the imagination. These figures of Bunyan's are already familiar inmates of the mind, and, if there be any sublimity in him, it is the daring frankness of his verisimilitude. Spenser's giants are those of the later romances, except that grand figure with the balances in the second Canto of Book V., the most original of all his conceptions, yet no real giant, but a pure eidolon of the mind. As Bunyan rises not seldom to a natural poetry, so Spenser sinks now and then, through the fault of his topics, to unmistakable prose. Take his description of the House of Alma,[2] for instance: —

> "The master cook was cald Concoctiön,
> A careful man, and full of comely guise;
> The kitchen-clerk, that hight Digestiön,
> Did order all the achates in seemly wise."

And so on through all the organs of the body. The author of Ecclesiastes understood these matters better in that last pathetic chapter of his, blun-

[1] Bunyan probably took the hint of the Giant's suicidal offer of "knife, halter, or poison," from Spenser's "swords, ropes, poison," in *Faery Queen*, B. I. c. ix. 1.

[2] Book II. c. 9.

deringly translated as it apparently is. This, I admit, is the worst failure of Spenser in this kind; though, even here, when he gets on to the organs of the mind, the enchantments of his fancy and style come to the rescue and put us in good-humor again, hard as it is to conceive of armed knights entering the chamber of the mind, and talking with such visionary damsels as Ambition and Shamefastness. Nay, even in the most prosy parts, unless my partiality deceive me, there is an infantile confidence in the magical powers of Prosopopœia which half beguiles us, as of children who *play* that everything is something else, and are quite satisfied with the transformation.

The problem for Spenser was a double one: how to commend poetry at all to a generation which thought it effeminate trifling,[1] and how he, Master Edmund Spenser, of imagination all compact, could commend *his* poetry to Master John Bull, the most practical of mankind in his habitual mood, but at that moment in a passion of religious anxiety about his soul. *Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci* was not only an irrefragable axiom because a Latin poet had said it, but it exactly met the case in point. He would convince the scorners that poetry might be seriously useful, and show Master Bull his new way of making fine words butter parsnips, in a rhymed moral primer. Allegory, as then practised, was imagination adapted for beginners, in words of one syllable and illustrated with cuts,

[1] See Sidney's *Defence*, and Puttenham's *Art of English Poesy*, Book I. c. 8.

and would thus serve both his ethical and pictorial purpose. Such a primer, or a first instalment of it, he proceeded to put forth; but he so bordered it with bright-colored fancies, he so often filled whole pages and crowded the text hard in others with the gay frolics of his pencil, that, as in the Grimani missal, the holy function of the book is forgotten in the ecstasy of its adornment. Worse than all, does not his brush linger more lovingly along the rosy contours of his sirens than on the modest wimples of the Wise Virgins? "The general end of the book," he tells us in his Dedication to Sir Walter Raleigh, "is to fashion a gentleman of noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline." But a little further on he evidently has a qualm, as he thinks how generously he had interpreted his promise of cuts: "To some I know this method will seem displeasant, which had rather have good discipline delivered plainly in way of precepts or sermoned at large,[1] as they use, than thus cloudily enwrapped in allegorical devices." Lord Burleigh was of this way of thinking, undoubtedly, but how could poor Clarion help it? Has he not said,

> "And whatso else *of virtue good or ill*,
> Grew in this garden, fetcht from far away,
> Of every one he takes and tastes at will,
> And on their pleasures greedily doth prey"?

One sometimes feels in reading him as if he were the pure sense of the beautiful incarnated to the one end that he might interpret it to our duller per-

[1] We can fancy how he would have done this by Jeremy Taylor, who was a kind of Spenser in a cassock.

ceptions. So exquisite was his sensibility,[1] that with him sensation and intellection seem identical, and we "can almost say his body thought." This subtle interfusion of sense with spirit it is that gives his poetry a crystalline purity without lack of warmth. He is full of feeling, and yet of such a kind that we can neither say it is mere intellectual perception of what is fair and good, nor yet associate it with that throbbing fervor which leads us to call sensibility by the physical name of heart.

Charles Lamb made the most pithy criticism of Spenser when he called him the poets' poet. We may fairly leave the allegory on one side, for perhaps, after all, he adopted it only for the reason that it was in fashion, and put it on as he did his ruff, not because it was becoming, but because it was the only wear. The true use of him is as a gallery of pictures which we visit as the mood takes us, and where we spend an hour or two at a time, long enough to sweeten our perceptions, not so long as to cloy them. He makes one think always of Venice; for not only is his style Venetian,[2] but as

[1] Of this he himself gives a striking hint, where speaking in his own person he suddenly breaks in on his narrative with the passionate cry,

"Ah, dearest God, me grant I dead be not defouled."

(*Faery Queen*, B. I. c. x. 43.)

[2] Was not this picture painted by Paul Veronese, for example?

"Arachne figured how Jove did abuse
Europa like a bull, and on his back
Her through the sea did bear: . . .
She seemed still back unto the land to look,
And her playfellows' aid to call, and fear
The dashing of the waves, that up she took

the gallery there is housed in the shell of an abandoned convent, so his in that of a deserted allegory. And again, as at Venice you swim in a gondola from Gian Bellini to Titian, and from Titian to Tintoret, so in him, where other cheer is wanting, the gentle sway of his measure, like the rhythmical impulse of the oar, floats you lullingly along from picture to picture.

> "If all the pens that ever poet held
> Had fed the feeling of their master's thoughts,
> And every sweetness that inspired their hearts
> Their minds and muses on admirëd themes,
> If all the heavenly quintessence they still
> From their immortal flowers of poesy,
> If these had made one poem's period,
> And all combined in beauty's worthiness;
> Yet should there hover in their restless heads
> One thought, one grace, one wonder at the best,
> Which into words no virtue can digest." [1]

Spenser at his best, has come as near to expressing this unattainable something as any other poet. He is so purely poet that with him the meaning does not so often modulate the music of the verse as the music makes great part of the meaning and leads

> Her dainty feet, and garments gathered near. . . .
> Before the bull she pictured wingëd Love,
> With his young brother Sport, . . .
> And many nymphs about them flocking round,
> And many Tritons which their horns did sound."
>
> (*Muiopotmos*, 281–296.)

Spenser begins a complimentary sonnet prefixed to the *Commonwealth and Government of Venice* (1599) with this beautiful verse,

> "Fair Venice, flower of the last world's delight."

Perhaps we should read "lost"?

[1] Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, Part I. Act V. 2.

the thought along its pleasant paths. No poet is so splendidly superfluous as he; none knows so well that in poetry enough is not only not so good as a feast, but is a beggarly parsimony. He spends himself in a careless abundance only to be justified by incomes of immortal youth.

> "Pensier canuto nè molto nè poco
> Si può quivi albergare in alcun cuore;
> Non entra quivi disagio nè inopia,
> Ma vi sta ogn'or col corno pien la Copia." [1]

This delicious abundance and overrunning luxury of Spenser appear in the very structure of his verse. He found the *ottava rima* too monotonously iterative; so, by changing the order of his rhymes, he shifted the couplet from the end of the stave, where it always seems to put on the brakes with a jar, to the middle, where it may serve at will as a brace or a bridge; he found it not roomy enough, so first ran it over into another line, and then ran that added line over into an alexandrine, in which the melody of one stanza seems forever longing and feeling forward after that which is to follow. There is no ebb and flow in his metre more than on the shores of the Adriatic, but wave follows wave with equable gainings and recessions, the one sliding back in fluent music to be mingled with and carried forward by the next. In all this there is soothingness indeed, but no slumberous monotony; for Spenser was no mere metrist, but a

[1] "Grayheaded Thought, nor much nor little, may
Take up its lodging here in any heart;
Unease nor Lack can enter at this door;
But here dwells full-horned Plenty evermore."
(*Orl. Fur.*, c. vi. 73.)

great composer. By the variety of his pauses — now at the close of the first or second foot, now of the third, and again of the fourth — he gives spirit and energy to a measure whose tendency it certainly is to become languorous. He knew how to make it rapid and passionate at need, as in such verses as,

> "But he, my lion, and my noble lord,
> How does he find in cruel heart to hate
> Her that him loved and ever most adored
> As the God of my life? Why hath he me abhorred?"[1]

or this,

> "Come hither, come hither, O, come hastily!"[2]

Joseph Warton objects to Spenser's stanza, that its "constraint led him into many absurdities." Of these he instances three, of which I shall notice only one, since the two others (which suppose him at a loss for words and rhymes) will hardly seem valid to any one who knows the poet. It is that it "obliged him to dilate the thing to be expressed, however unimportant, with trifling and tedious circumlocutions, namely, Faery Queen, II. ii. 44: —

> 'Now hath fair Phœbe with her silver face
> Thrice seen the shadows of this nether world,
> Sith last I left that honorable place,
> In which her royal presence is enrolled.'

That is, it is three months since I left her palace."[3]

[1] *Faery Queen*, I. c. iii. 7. Leigh Hunt, one of the most sympathetic of critics, has remarked the passionate change from the third to the first person in the last two verses.

[2] *Faery Queen*, II. c. viii. 3.

[3] *Observations on Faery Queen*, vol. i. pp. 158, 159. Mr. Hughes also objects to Spenser's measure, that it is "closed always by a full-stop, in the same place, by which every stanza is made as it

But Dr. Warton should have remembered (what he too often forgets in his own verses) that, in spite of Dr. Johnson's dictum, poetry is not prose, and that verse only loses its advantage over the latter by invading its province.[1] Verse itself is an absurdity except as an expression of some higher movement of the mind, or as an expedient to lift other minds to the same ideal level. It is the cothurnus which gives language an heroic stature. I have said that one leading characteristic of Spenser's style was its spaciousness, that he habitually dilates rather than compresses. But his way of measuring time was perfectly natural in an age when everybody did not carry a dial in his poke as now. He is the last of the poets, who went (without affectation) by the great clock of the firmament. Dante, the miser of words, who goes by the same timepiece, is full of these roundabout ways of telling us the hour. It had nothing to do with Spenser's stanza, and I for one should be sorry to

were a distinct paragraph." (Todd's *Spenser*, II. xli.) But he could hardly have read the poem attentively, for there are numerous instances to the contrary. Spenser was a consummate master of versification, and not only did Marlowe and Shakespeare learn of him, but I have little doubt that, but for the *Faery Queen*, we should never have had the varied majesty of Milton's blank verse.

[1] As where Dr. Warton himself says: —

> "How nearly had my spirit past,
> Till stopt by Metcalf's skilful hand,
> To death's dark regions wide and waste
> And the black river's mournful strand,
> Or to," etc.,

to the end of the next stanza. That is, I had died but for Dr. Metcalf's boluses.

[redacted]

lose these stately revolutions of the *superne ruote.* Time itself becomes more noble when so measured; we never knew before of how precious a commodity we had the wasting. Who would prefer the plain time of day to this?

> "Now when Aldebaran was mounted high
> Above the starry Cassiopeia's chair";

or this?

> "By this the northern wagoner had set
> His seven-fold team behind the steadfast star
> That was in ocean's waves yet never wet,
> But firm is fixt and sendeth light from far
> To all that in the wide deep wandering are";

or this?

> "At last the golden oriental gate
> Of greatest heaven gan to open fair,
> And Phœbus, fresh as bridegroom to his mate,
> Came dancing forth, shaking his dewy hair
> And hurls his glistening beams through dewy air."

The generous indefiniteness, which treats an hour more or less as of no account, is in keeping with that sense of endless leisures which it is one chief merit of the poem to suggest. But Spenser's dilatation extends to thoughts as well as to phrases and images. He does not love the concise. Yet his dilatation is not mere distension, but the expansion of natural growth in the rich soil of his own mind, wherein the merest stick of a verse puts forth leaves and blossoms. Here is one of his, suggested by Homer:[1] —

[1] *Iliad*, XVII. 55 *seqq.* Referred to in Upton's note on *Faery Queen*, B. I. c. vii. 32. Into what a breezy couplet trailing off with an alexandrine has Homer's πνοιαὶ παντοίων ἀνέμων ex-

"Upon the top of all his lofty crest
A bunch of hairs discolored diversly,
With sprinkled pearl and gold full richly drest,
Did shake, and seemed to dance for jollity;
Like to an almond-tree ymounted high
On top of green Selinus all alone
With blossoms brave bedeckèd daintily,
Whose tender locks do tremble every one
At every little breath that under heaven is blown."

And this is the way he reproduces five pregnant verses of Dante: —

"Seggendo in piume
In fama non si vien, nè sotto coltre,
Senza la qual chi sua vita consuma,
Cotal vestigio in terra di se lascia
Qual fumo in aere ed in acqua la schiuma."[1]

"Whoso in pomp of proud estate, quoth she,
Does swim, and bathes himself in courtly bliss,
Does waste his days in dark obscurity
And in oblivion ever buried is;
Where ease abounds it 's eath to do amiss:
But who his limbs with labors and his mind
Behaves with cares, cannot so easy miss.

panded! Chapman unfortunately has slurred this passage in his version, and Pope *tittivated* it more than usual in his. I have no other translation at hand. Marlowe was so taken by this passage in Spenser that he put it bodily into his *Tamburlaine*.

[1] *Inferno*, XXIV. 46–52.

"For sitting upon down,
Or under quilt, one cometh not to fame,
Withouten which whoso his life consumes
Such vestige leaveth of himself on earth
As smoke in air or in the water foam."
(Longfellow.)

It shows how little Dante was read during the last century that none of the commentators on Spenser notice his most important obligations to the great Tuscan.

Abroad in arms, at home in studious kind,
Who seeks with painful toil shall Honor soonest find.

" In woods, in waves, in wars, she wonts to dwell,
And will be found with peril and with pain,
Ne can the man that moulds in idle cell
Unto her happy mansiön attain;
Before her gate high God did Sweat ordain,
And wakeful watches ever to abide;
But easy is the way and passage plain
To pleasure's palace; it may soon be spied,
And day and night her doors to all stand open wide." [1]

Spenser's mind always demands this large elbow-room. His thoughts are never pithily expressed, but with a stately and sonorous proclamation, as if under the open sky, that seems to me very noble. For example, —

"The noble heart that harbors virtuous thought
And is with child of glorious-great intent
Can never rest until it forth have brought
The eternal brood of glory excellent." [2]

One's very soul seems to dilate with that last verse. And here is a passage which Milton had read and remembered: —

" And is there care in Heaven? and is there love
In heavenly spirits to these creatures base,
That may compassion of their evils move?
There is: else much more wretched were the case
Of men than beasts: but O, the exceeding grace
Of highest God, that loves his creatures so,
And all his works with mercy doth embrace,
That blessed angels he sends to and fro,
To serve to wicked man, to serve his wicked foe!

" How oft do they their silver bowers leave,
To come to succor us that succor want!

[1] *Faery Queen*, B. II. c. iii. 40, 41.
[2] Ibid., I. c. v. 1.

> How oft do they with golden pinions cleave
> The fleeting skies like flying pursuivant,
> Against foul fiends to aid us militant!
> They for us fight, they watch and duly ward,
> And their bright squadrons round about us plant;
> And all for love and nothing for reward;
> O, why should heavenly God to men have such regard?"[1]

His natural tendency is to shun whatever is sharp and abrupt. He loves to prolong emotion, and lingers in his honeyed sensations like a bee in the translucent cup of a lily. So entirely are beauty and delight in it the native element of Spenser, that, whenever in the "Faery Queen" you come suddenly on the moral, it gives you a shock of unpleasant surprise, a kind of grit, as when one's teeth close on a bit of gravel in a dish of strawberries and cream. He is the most fluent of our poets. Sensation passing through emotion into revery is a prime quality of his manner. And to read him puts one in the condition of revery, a state of mind in which our thoughts and feelings float motionless, as one sees fish do in a gentle stream, with just enough vibration of their fins to keep themselves from going down with the current, while their bodies yield indolently to all its soothing curves. He chooses his language for its rich canorousness rather than for intensity of meaning. To characterize his style in a single word, I should call it *costly*. None but the daintiest and nicest phrases will serve him, and he allures us from one to the other with such cunning baits of alliteration, and such sweet lapses of verse, that never any word

[1] *Faery Queen*, II. c. viii. 1, 2.

seems more eminent than the rest, nor detains the feeling to eddy around it, but you must go on to the end before you have time to stop and muse over the wealth that has been lavished on you. But he has characterized and exemplified his own style better than any description could do: —

> "For round about the walls yclothed were
> With goodly arras of great majesty,
> Woven with gold and silk so close and near
> That the rich metal lurked privily
> As faining to be hid from envious eye;
> Yet here and there and everywhere, unwares
> It showed itself and shone unwillingly
> Like to a discolored snake whose hidden snares
> Through the green grass his long bright-burnished back declares." [1]

And of the lulling quality of his verse take this as a sample: —

> "And, more to lull him in his slumber soft,
> A trickling stream from high rock tumbling down
> And ever drizzling rain upon the loft,
> Mixt with the murmuring wind much like the soun
> Of swarming bees did cast him in a swoon.
> No other noise, nor peoples' troublous cries,
> As still are wont to annoy the wallëd town,
> Might there be heard: but careless quiet lies
> Wrapt in eternal silence far from enemies." [2]

In the world into which Spenser carries us there is neither time nor space, or rather it is outside of and independent of them both, and so is purely ideal, or, more truly, imaginary; yet it is full of form, color, and all earthly luxury, and so far, if not real, yet apprehensible by the senses. There are no men and women in it, yet it throngs with

[1] *Faery Queen*, III. c. xi. 28. [2] Ibid., I. c. i. 41.

airy and immortal shapes that have the likeness of men and women, and hint at some kind of foregone reality. Now this place, somewhere between mind and matter, between soul and sense, between the actual and the possible, is precisely the region which Spenser assigns (if I have rightly divined him) to the poetic susceptibility of impression,—

"To reign in the air from the earth to highest sky."

Underneath every one of the senses lies the soul and spirit of it, dormant till they are magnetized by some powerful emotion. Then whatever is imperishable in us recognizes for an instant and claims kindred with something outside and distinct from it, yet in some inconceivable way a part of it, that flashes back on it an ideal beauty which impoverishes all other companionship. This exaltation with which love sometimes subtilizes the nerves of coarsest men so that they feel and see, not the thing as it seems to others, but the beauty of it, the joy of it, the soul of eternal youth that is in it, would appear to have been the normal condition of Spenser. While the senses of most men live in the cellar, his "were laid in a large upper chamber which opened toward the sunrising."

"His birth was of the womb of morning dew,
And his conception of the joyous prime."

The very greatest poets (and is there, after all, more than one of them?) have a way, I admit, of getting within our inmost consciousness and in a manner betraying us to ourselves. There is in Spenser a remoteness very different from this, but

it is also a seclusion, and quite as agreeable, perhaps quite as wholesome in certain moods when we are glad to get away from ourselves and those importunate trifles which we gravely call the realities of life. In the warm Mediterranean of his mind everything

> "Suffers a sea-change
> Into something rich and strange."

He lifts everything, not beyond recognition, but to an ideal distance where no mortal, I had almost said human, fleck is visible. Instead of the ordinary bridal gifts, he hallows his wife with an Epithalamion fit for a conscious goddess, and the "savage soil"[1] of Ireland becomes a turf of Arcady under her feet, where the merchants' daughters of the town are no more at home than the angels and the fair shapes of pagan mythology whom they meet there. He seems to have had a common-sense side to him, and could look at things (if we may judge by his tract on Irish affairs) in a practical and even hard way; but the moment he turned toward poetry he fulfilled the condition which his teacher Plato imposes on poets, and had not a particle of prosaic understanding left. His fancy, habitually moving about in worlds not realized, unrealizes everything at a touch. The critics blame him because in his Prothalamion the sub-

[1] This phrase occurs in the sonnet addressed to the Earl of Ormond and in that to Lord Grey de Wilton in the series prefixed to the *Faery Queen*. These sonnets are of a much stronger build than the *Amoretti*, and some of them (especially that to Sir John Norris) recall the firm tread of Milton's, though differing in structure.

jects of it enter on the Thames as swans and leave it at Temple Gardens as noble damsels; but to those who are grown familiar with his imaginary world such a transformation seems as natural as in the old legend of the Knight of the Swan.

"Come now ye damsels, daughters of Delight,
Help quickly her to dight:
But first come ye, fair Hours, which were begot
In Jove's sweet paradise of Day and Night, . . .
And ye three handmaids of the Cyprian Queen,
The which do still adorn her beauty's pride,
Help to adorn my beautifulest bride.
. . . . . .
Crown ye god Bacchus with a coronal,
And Hymen also crown with wreaths of vine,
And let the Graces dance unto the rest, —
For they can do it best.
The whiles the maidens do their carols sing,
To which the woods shall answer and their echo ring."

The whole Epithalamion is very noble, with an organ-like roll and majesty of numbers, while it is instinct with the same joyousness which must have been the familiar mood of Spenser. It is no superficial and tiresome merriment, but a profound delight in the beauty of the universe and in that delicately surfaced nature of his which was its mirror and counterpart. Sadness was alien to him, and at funerals he was, to be sure, a decorous mourner, as could not fail with so sympathetic a temperament; but his condolences are graduated to the unimpassioned scale of social requirement. Even for Sir Philip Sidney his sighs are regulated by the official standard. It was in an unreal world that his affections found their true object and vent, and it is in an elegy of a lady whom he had never

known that he puts into the mouth of a husband whom he has evaporated into a shepherd the two most naturally pathetic verses he ever penned: —

> "I hate the day because it lendeth light
> To see all things, but not my love to see." [1]

In the Epithalamion there is an epithet which has been much admired for its felicitous tenderness: —

> "Behold, whiles she before the altar stands,
> Hearing the holy priest that to her speakes
> And blesseth her with his two *happy* hands."

But the purely impersonal passion of the artist had already guided him to this lucky phrase. It is addressed by Holiness — a dame surely as far abstracted from the enthusiasms of love as we can readily conceive of — to Una, who, like the visionary Helen of Dr. Faustus, has every charm of womanhood except that of being alive, as Juliet and Beatrice are.

> "O happy earth,
> Whereon thy innocent feet do ever tread!" [2]

Can we conceive of Una, the fall of whose foot would be as soft as that of a rose-leaf upon its mates already fallen, — can we conceive of her treading anything so sordid? No; it is only on some unsubstantial floor of dream that she walks securely, herself a dream. And it is only when Spenser has escaped thither, only when this glamour of fancy has rarefied his wife till she is grown almost as purely a creature of the imagination as the other ideal images with which he converses,

[1] *Daphnaida*, 407, 408.
[2] *Faery Queen*, I. c. x. 9.

that his feeling becomes as nearly passionate — as nearly human, I was on the point of saying — as with him is possible. I am so far from blaming this idealizing property of his mind, that I find it admirable in him. It is his quality, not his defect. Without some touch of it life would be unendurable prose. If I have called the world to which he transports us a world of unreality, I have wronged him. It is only a world of unrealism. It is from pots and pans and stocks and futile gossip and inch-long politics that he emancipates us, and makes us free of that to-morrow, always coming and never come, where ideas shall reign supreme.[1] But I am keeping my readers from the sweetest idealization that love ever wrought: —

"Unto this place whenas the elfin knight
Approached, him seemëd that the merry sound
Of a shrill pipe, he playing heard on height,
And many feet fast thumping the hollow ground,
That through the woods their echo did rebound;
He nigher drew to wit what it mote be.
There he a troop of ladies dancing found
Full merrily and making gladful glee;
And in the midst a shepherd piping he did see.

"He durst not enter into the open green
For dread of them unwares to be descried,
For breaking of their dance, if he were seen;
But in the covert of the wood did bide
Beholding all, yet of them unespied;
There he did see that pleased so much his sight

[1] Strictly taken, perhaps his world is not *much* more imaginary than that of other epic poets, Homer (in the *Iliad*) included. He who is familiar with mediæval epics will be extremely cautious in drawing inferences as to contemporary manners from Homer. He evidently *archaizes* like the rest.

That even he himself his eyes envied,
A hundred naked maidens lily-white,
All rangëd in a ring and dancing in delight.

"All they without were rangëd in a ring,
And dancëd round; but in the midst of them
Three other ladies did both dance and sing,
The while the rest them round about did hem,
And like a garland did in compass stem.
And in the midst of these same three was placed
Another damsel, as a precious gem
Amidst a ring most richly well enchased,
That with her goodly presence all the rest much graced.

'Look how the crown which Ariadne wove
Upon her ivory forehead that same day,
That Theseus her unto his bridal bore,
(When the bold Centaurs made that bloody fray,
With the fierce Lapithes, that did them dismay)
Being now placëd in the firmament,
Through the bright heaven doth her beams display,
And is unto the stars an ornament,
Which round about her move in order excellent;

"Such was the beauty of this goodly band,
Whose sundry parts were here too long to tell,
But she that in the midst of them did stand,
Seemed all the rest in beauty to excel,
Crowned with a rosy garland that right well
Did her beseem. And, ever as the crew
About her danced, sweet flowers that far did smell,
And fragrant odors they upon her threw;
But most of all those three did her with gifts endue.

"Those were the graces, Daughters of Delight,
Handmaids of Venus, which are wont to haunt
Upon this hill and dance there, day and night;
Those three to men all gifts of grace do grant
And all that Venus in herself doth vaunt
Is borrowëd of them; but that fair one
That in the midst was placed paravant,

Was she to whom that shepherd piped alone,
That made him pipe so merrily, as never none.

"She was, to weet, that jolly shepherd's lass
Which pipëd there unto that merry rout;
That jolly shepherd that there pipëd was
Poor Colin Clout; (who knows not Colin Clout?)
He piped apace while they him danced about;
Pipe, jolly shepherd, pipe thou now apace,
Unto thy love that made thee low to lout;
Thy love is present there with thee in place,
Thy love is there advanced to be another Grace."[1]

Is there any passage in any poet that so ripples and sparkles with simple delight as this? It is a sky of Italian April full of sunshine and the hidden ecstasy of larks. And we like it all the more that it reminds us of that passage in his friend Sidney's *Arcadia*, where the shepherd-boy pipes "as if he would never be old." If we compare it with the mystical scene in Dante,[2] of which it is a reminiscence, it will seem almost like a bit of real life; but taken by itself it floats as unconcerned in our cares and sorrows and vulgarities as a sunset cloud. The sound of that pastoral pipe seems to come from as far away as Thessaly when Apollo was keeping sheep there. Sorrow, the great idealizer, had had the portrait of Beatrice on her easel for years, and every touch of her pencil transfigured the woman more and more into the glorified saint. But Elizabeth Nagle was a solid thing of flesh and blood, who would sit down at meat with the poet on the very day when he had thus beati-

[1] *Faery Queen*, VI. c. x. 10-16.
[2] *Purgatorio*, XXIX., XXX.

fied her. As Dante was drawn upward from heaven to heaven by the eyes of Beatrice, so was Spenser lifted away from the actual by those of that ideal Beauty whereof his mind had conceived the lineaments in its solitary musings over Plato, but of whose haunting presence the delicacy of his senses had already premonished him. The intrusion of the real world upon this supersensual mood of his wrought an instant disenchantment: —

> "Much wondered Calidore at this strange sight
> Whose like before his eye had never seen,
> And, standing long astonishëd in sprite
> And rapt with pleasance, wist not what to ween,
> Whether it were the train of Beauty's Queen,
> Or Nymphs, or Fairies, or enchanted show
> With which his eyes might have deluded been,
> Therefore resolving what it was to know,
> Out of the woods he rose and toward them did go.
>
> "But soon as he appearëd to their view
> They vanished all away out of his sight
> And clean were gone, which way he never knew,
> All save the shepherd, who, for fell despite
> Of that displeasure, broke his bagpipe quite."

Ben Jonson said that "he had consumed a whole night looking to his great toe, about which he had seen Tartars and Turks, Romans and Carthaginians, fight in his imagination"; and Coleridge has told us how his "eyes made pictures when they were shut." This is not uncommon, but I fancy that Spenser was more habitually possessed by his imagination than is usual even with poets. His visions must have accompanied him "in glory and in joy" along the common thoroughfares of life and seemed to him, it may be suspected, more

real than the men and women he met there. His "most fine spirit of sense" would have tended to keep him in this exalted mood. I must give an example of the sensuousness of which I have spoken: —

"And in the midst of all a fountain stood
Of richest substance that on earth might be,
So pure and shiny that the crystal flood
Through every channel running one might see;
Most goodly it with curious imagery
Was overwrought, and shapes of naked boys,
Of which some seemed with lively jollity
To fly about, playing their wanton toys,
Whilst others did themselves embay in liquid joys.

"And over all, of purest gold was spread
A trail of ivy in his native hue;
For the rich metal was so colorëd
That he who did not well avised it view
Would surely deem it to be ivy true;
Low his lascivious arms adown did creep
That themselves dipping in the silver dew
Their fleecy flowers they tenderly did steep,
Which drops of crystal seemed for wantonness to weep.

"Infinite streams continually did well
Out of this fountain, sweet and fair to see,
The which into an ample laver fell,
And shortly grew to so great quantity
That like a little lake it seemed to be
Whose depth exceeded not three cubits' height,
That through the waves one might the bottom see
All paved beneath with jasper shining bright,
That seemed the fountain in that sea did sail upright.

"And all the margent round about was set
With shady laurel-trees, thence to defend
The sunny beams which on the billows bet,
And those which therein bathëd mote offend.

As Guyon happened by the same to wend
Two naked Damsels he therein espied,
Which therein bathing seemëd to contend
And wrestle wantonly, ne cared to hide
Their dainty parts from view of any which them eyed.

"Sometimes the one would lift the other quite
Above the waters, and then down again
Her plunge, as overmasterëd by might,
Where both awhile would coverëd remain,
And each the other from to rise restrain;
The whiles their snowy limbs, as through a veil,
So through the crystal waves appearëd plain:
Then suddenly both would themselves unhele,
And the amorous sweet spoils to greedy eyes reveal.

"As that fair star, the messenger of morn,
His dewy face out of the sea doth rear;
Or as the Cyprian goddess, newly born
Of the ocean's fruitful froth, did first appear;
Such seemed they, and so their yellow hear
Crystalline humor droppëd down apace.
Whom such when Guyon saw, he drew him near,
And somewhat gan relent his earnest pace;
His stubborn breast gan secret pleasance to embrace.

"The wanton Maidens him espying, stood
Gazing awhile at his unwonted guise;
Then the one herself low duckëd in the flood,
Abashed that her a stranger did avise;
But the other rather higher did arise,
And her two lily paps aloft displayed,
And all that might his melting heart entice
To her delights, she unto him bewrayed;
The rest, hid underneath, him more desirous made.

"With that the other likewise up arose,
And her fair locks, which formerly were bound
Up in one knot, she low adown did loose,
Which flowing long and thick her clothed around,
And the ivory in golden mantle gowned:

So that fair spectacle from him was reft,
Yet that which reft it no less fair was found;
So hid in locks and waves from lookers' theft,
Naught but her lovely face she for his looking left.

"Withal she laughëd, and she blushed withal,
That blushing to her laughter gave more grace,
And laughter to her blushing, as did fall.
. . . . . .
Eftsoones they heard a most melodious sound,
Of all that mote delight a dainty ear,
Such as at once might not on living ground,
Save in this paradise, be heard elsewhere:
Right hard it was for wight which did it hear
To read what manner music that mote be;
For all that pleasing is to living ear
Was there consorted in one harmony;
Birds, voices, instruments, winds, waters, all agree.

"The joyous birds, shrouded in cheerful shade,
Their notes unto the voice attempered sweet;
The angelical soft trembling voices made
To the instruments divine respondence mete;
The silver-sounding instruments did meet
With the base murmur of the water's fall;
The water's fall with difference discreet,
Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call;
The gentle warbling wind low answerëd to all."

Spenser, in one of his letters to Harvey, had said, "Why, a God's name, may not we, as else the Greeks, have the kingdom of our own language?" This is in the tone of Bellay, as is also a great deal of what is said in the epistle prefixed to the "Shepherd's Calendar." He would have been wiser had he followed more closely Bellay's advice about the introduction of novel words: "Fear not, then, to innovate somewhat, particularly in a long poem, with modesty, however, with analogy, and judg-

ment of ear; and trouble not thyself as to who may think it good or bad, hoping that posterity will approve it, — she who gives faith to doubtful, light to obscure, novelty to antique, usage to unaccustomed, and sweetness to harsh and rude things." Spenser's innovations were by no means always happy, as not always according with the genius of the language, and they have therefore not prevailed. He forms English words out of French or Italian ones, sometimes, I think, on a misapprehension of their true meaning; nay, he sometimes makes new ones by unlawfully grafting a scion of Romance on a Teutonic root. His theory, caught from Bellay, of rescuing good archaisms from unwarranted oblivion, was excellent; not so his practice of being archaic for the mere sake of escaping from the common and familiar. A permissible archaism is a word or phrase that has been supplanted by something less apt, but has not become unintelligible; and Spenser's often needed a glossary, even in his own day.[1] But he never endangers his finest passages by any experiments of this kind. There his language is living, if ever any, and of one substance with the splendor of his fancy. Like all masters of speech, he is fond of toying with and teasing it a little; and it may readily be granted that he sometimes "hunted the letter," as it was called, out of all cry. But even where his allitera-

[1] I find a goodly number of Yankeeisms in him, such as *idee* (not as a rhyme); but the oddest is his twice spelling *dew deow*, which is just as one would spell it who wished to phonetize its sound in rural New England.

tion is tempted to an excess, its prolonged echoes caress the ear like the fading and gathering reverberations of an Alpine horn, and one can find in his heart to forgive even such a debauch of initial assonances as

> "Eftsoones her shallow ship away did slide,
> More swift than swallow sheares the liquid sky."

Generally, he scatters them at adroit intervals, reminding us of the arrangement of voices in an ancient catch, where one voice takes up the phrase another has dropped, and thus seems to give the web of harmony a firmer and more continuous texture.

Other poets have held their mirrors up to nature, mirrors that differ very widely in the truth and beauty of the images they reflect; but Spenser's is a magic glass in which we see few shadows cast back from actual life, but visionary shapes conjured up by the wizard's art from some confusedly remembered past or some impossible future; it is like one of those still pools of mediæval legend which covers some sunken city of the antique world; a reservoir in which all our dreams seem to have been gathered. As we float upon it, we see that it pictures faithfully enough the summer-clouds that drift over it, the trees that grow about its margin, but in the midst of these shadowy echoes of actuality we catch faint tones of bells that seem blown to us from beyond the horizon of time, and looking down into the clear depths, catch glimpses of towers and far-shining knights and peerless dames that waver and are gone. Is it a world that

ever was, or shall be, or can be, or but a delusion? Spenser's world, real to him, is real enough for us to take a holiday in, and we may well be content with it when the earth we dwell on is so often too real to allow of such vacations. It is the same kind of world that Petrarca's Laura has walked in for five centuries with all ears listening for the music of her footfall.

The land of Spenser is the land of Dream, but it is also the land of Rest. To read him is like dreaming awake, without even the trouble of doing it yourself, but letting it be done for you by the finest dreamer that ever lived, who knows how to color his dreams like life and make them move before you in music. They seem singing to you as the sirens to Guyon, and we linger like him: —

"O, thou fair son of gentle Faery
That art in mighty arms most magnified
Above all knights that ever battle tried,
O, turn thy rudder hitherward awhile,
Here may thy storm-beat vessel safely ride,
This is the port of rest from troublous toil,
The world's sweet inn from pain and wearisome turmoil.[1]

"With that the rolling sea, resounding swift
In his big bass, them fitly answerèd,

[1] This song recalls that in Dante's *Purgatorio* (XIX. 19–24), in which the Italian tongue puts forth all its siren allurements. Browne's beautiful verses ("Turn, hither turn your wingèd pines") were suggested by these of Spenser. It might almost seem as if Spenser had here, in his usual way, expanded the sweet old verses: —

"Merry sungen the monks binnen Ely
When Knut king rew thereby;
'Roweth knightès near the lond,
That I may hear these monkès song.'"

> And on the rock the waves, breaking aloft,
> A solemn mean unto them measurëd,
> The whiles sweet Zephyrus loud whistelëd
> His treble, a strange kind of harmony
> Which Guyon's senses softly tickelëd
> That he the boatman bade row easily
> And let him hear some part of their rare melody."

Despite Spenser's instinctive tendency to idealize, and his habit of distilling out of the actual an ethereal essence in which very little of the possible seems left, yet his mind, as is generally true of great poets, was founded on a solid basis of good-sense. I do not know where to look for a more cogent and at the same time picturesque confutation of Socialism than in the Second Canto of the Fifth Book. If I apprehend rightly his words and images, there is not only subtle but profound thinking here. The French Revolution is prefigured in the well-meaning but too theoretic giant, and Rousseau's fallacies exposed two centuries in advance. Spenser was a conscious Englishman to his inmost fibre, and did not lack the sound judgment in politics which belongs to his race. He was the more English for living in Ireland, and there is something that moves us deeply in the exile's passionate cry: —

> "Dear Country! O how dearly dear
> Ought thy remembrance and perpetual band
> Be to thy foster-child that from thy hand
> Did common breath and nouriture receive!
> How brutish is it not to understand
> How much to her we owe that all us gave,
> That gave unto us all whatever good we have!"

His race shows itself also where he tells us that

"chiefly skill to ride seems a science
Proper to gentle blood,"

which reminds one of Lord Herbert of Cherbury's saying that the finest sight God looked down on was a fine man on a fine horse.

Wordsworth, in the supplement to his preface, tells us that the "Faery Queen" "faded before" Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas. But Wordsworth held a brief for himself in this case, and is no exception to the proverb about men who are their own attorneys. His statement is wholly unfounded. Both poems, no doubt, so far as popularity is concerned, yielded to the graver interests of the Civil War. But there is an appreciation much weightier than any that is implied in mere popularity, and the vitality of a poem is to be measured by the kind as well as the amount of influence it exerts. Spenser has *coached* more poets and more eminent ones than any other writer of English verse. I need say nothing of Milton, nor of professed disciples like Browne, the two Fletchers, and More. Cowley tells us that he became "irrecoverably a poet" by reading the "Faery Queen" when a boy. Dryden, whose case is particularly in point because he confesses having been seduced by Du Bartas, tells us that Spenser had been his master in English. He regrets, indeed, comically enough, that Spenser could not have read the rules of Bossu, but adds that "no man was ever born with a greater genius or more knowledge to support it." Pope says, "There is something in Spenser that pleases one as strongly in one's old age as it

did in one's youth. I read the *Faery Queen* when I was about twelve with a vast deal of delight; and I think it gave me as much when I read it over about a year or two ago." Thomson wrote the most delightful of his poems in the measure of Spenser; Collins, Gray, and Akenside show traces of him; and in our own day his influence reappears in Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Landor is, I believe, the only poet who ever found him tedious. Spenser's mere manner has not had so many imitators as Milton's, but no other of our poets has given an impulse, and in the right direction also, to so many and so diverse minds; above all, no other has given to so many young souls a consciousness of their wings and a delight in the use of them. He is a standing protest against the tyranny of Commonplace, and sows the seeds of a noble discontent with prosaic views of life and the dull uses to which it may be put.

Three of Spenser's own verses best characterize the feeling his poetry gives us: —

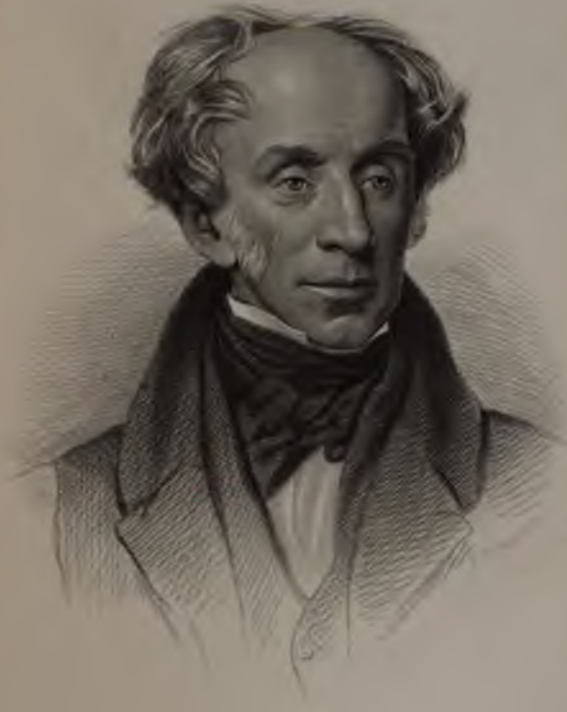
"Among wide waves set like a little nest,"

"Wrapt in eternal silence far from enemies,"

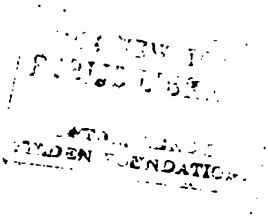
"The world's sweet inn from pain and wearisome turmoil."

We are wont to apologize for the grossness of our favorite authors sometimes by saying that their age was to blame and not they; and the excuse is a good one, for often it is the frank word that shocks us while we tolerate the thing. Spenser needs no such extenuations. No man can read the "Faery

Queen" and be anything but the better for it. Through that rude age, when Maids of Honor drank beer for breakfast and Hamlet could say a gross thing to Ophelia, he passes serenely abstracted and high, the Don Quixote of poets. Whoever can endure unmixed delight, whoever can tolerate music and painting and poetry all in one, whoever wishes to be rid of thought and to let the busy anvils of the brain be silent for a time, let him read in the "Faery Queen." There is the land of pure heart's ease, where no ache or sorrow of spirit can enter.



W. Wordsworth



able to the ordinary tests of cold-blooded criticism. Like the hymns of the Huguenots and Covenanters, they were songs of battle no less than of worship, and the combined ardors of conviction and conflict lent them a fire that was not naturally their own. As we read them now, that virtue of the moment is gone out of them, and whatever of Dr. Wattsiness there is gives us a slight shock of disenchantment. It is something like the difference between the *Marseillaise* sung by armed propagandists on the edge of battle, or by Brissotins in the tumbrel, and the words of it read coolly in the closet, or recited with the factitious frenzy of Thérèse. It was natural in the early days of Wordsworth's career to dwell most fondly on those profounder qualities to appreciate which settled in some sort the measure of a man's right to judge of poetry at all. But now we must admit the shortcomings, the failures, the defects, as no less essential elements in forming a sound judgment as to whether the seer and artist were so united in him as to justify the claim first put in by himself and afterwards maintained by his sect to a place beside the few great poets who exalt men's minds, and give a right direction and safe outlet to their passions through the imagination, while insensibly helping them toward balance of character and serenity of judgment by stimulating their sense of proportion, form, and the nice adjustment of means to ends. In none of our poets has the constant propulsion of an unbending will, and the concentration of exclusive, if I must not say somewhat

narrow, sympathies done so much to make the original endowment of nature effective, and in none accordingly does the biography throw so much light on the works, or enter so largely into their composition as an element whether of power or of weakness. Wordsworth never saw, and I think never wished to see, beyond the limits of his own consciousness and experience. He early conceived himself to be, and through life was confirmed by circumstances in the faith that he was, a "dedicated spirit,"[1] a state of mind likely to further an intense but at the same time one-sided development of the intellectual powers. The solitude in which the greater part of his mature life was passed, while it doubtless ministered to the passionate intensity of his musings upon man and nature, was, it may be suspected, harmful to him as an artist, by depriving him of any standard of proportion outside himself by which to test the comparative value of his thoughts, and by rendering him more and more incapable of that urbanity of mind which could be gained only by commerce with men more nearly on his own level, and which gives tone without lessening individuality. Wordsworth never quite saw the distinction between the eccentric and the original. For what we call originality seems not

[1] In the *Prelude* he attributes this consecration to a sunrise seen (during a college vacation) as he walked homeward from some village festival where he had danced all night: —

> "My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows
> Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
> Was given that I should be, else sinning greatly,
> A dedicated Spirit." (B. IV.)

so much anything peculiar, much less anything odd, but that quality in a man which touches human nature at most points of its circumference, which reinvigorates the consciousness of our own powers by recalling and confirming our own unvalued sensations and perceptions, gives classic shape to our own amorphous imaginings, and adequate utterance to our own stammering conceptions or emotions. The poet's office is to be a Voice, not of one crying in the wilderness to a knot of already magnetized acolytes, but singing amid the throng of men, and lifting their common aspirations and sympathies (so first clearly revealed to themselves) on the wings of his song to a purer ether and a wider reach of view. We cannot, if we would, read the poetry of Wordsworth as mere poetry; at every other page we find ourselves entangled in a problem of æsthetics. The world-old question of matter and form, of whether nectar *is* of precisely the same flavor when served to us from a Grecian chalice or from any jug of ruder pottery, comes up for decision anew. The Teutonic nature has always shown a sturdy preference of the solid bone with a marrow of nutritious moral to any shadow of the same on the flowing mirror of sense. Wordsworth never lets us long forget the deeply rooted stock from which he sprang, — *vien ben dà lui*.

William Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth in Cumberland, on the 7th of April, 1770, the second of five children. His father was John

Wordsworth, an attorney-at-law, and agent of Sir James Lowther, afterwards first Earl of Lonsdale. His mother was Anne Cookson, the daughter of a mercer in Penrith. His paternal ancestors had been settled immemorially at Penistone in Yorkshire, whence his grandfather had emigrated to Westmoreland. His mother, a woman of piety and wisdom, died in March, 1778, being then in her thirty-second year. His father, who never entirely cast off the depression occasioned by her death, survived her but five years, dying in December, 1783, when William was not quite fourteen years old.

The poet's early childhood was passed partly at Cockermouth, and partly with his maternal grandfather at Penrith. His first teacher appears to have been Mrs. Anne Birkett, a kind of Shenstone's Schoolmistress, who practised the memory of her pupils, teaching them chiefly by rote, and not endeavoring to cultivate their reasoning faculties, a process by which children are apt to be converted from natural logicians into impertinent sophists. Among his schoolmates here was Mary Hutchinson, who afterwards became his wife.

In 1778 he was sent to a school founded by Edwin Sandys, Archbishop of York,[1] in the year 1585, at Hawkshead in Lancashire. Hawkshead is a small market-town in the vale of Esthwaite, about a third of a mile northwest of the lake. Here Wordsworth

[1] Father of George Sandys, Treasurer of the Virginia Company, translator, while in Virginia, of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and author of a book of travels in the East dear to Dr. Johnson.

passed nine years, among a people of simple habits and scenery of a sweet and pastoral dignity. His earliest intimacies were with the mountains, lakes, and streams of his native district, and the associations with which his mind was stored during its most impressible period were noble and pure. The boys were boarded among the dames of the village, thus enjoying a freedom from scholastic restraints, which could be nothing but beneficial in a place where the temptations were only to sports that hardened the body while they fostered a love of nature in the spirit and habits of observation in the mind. Wordsworth's ordinary amusements here were hunting and fishing, rowing, skating, and long walks around the lake and among the hills, with an occasional scamper on horseback.[1] His life as a school-boy was favorable also to his poetic development, in being identified with that of the people among whom he lived. Among men of simple habits, and where there are small diversities of condition, the feelings and passions are displayed with less restraint, and the young poet grew acquainted with that primal human basis of character where the Muse finds firm foothold, and to which he ever afterward cleared his way through all the overlying drift of conventionalism. The dalesmen were a primitive and hardy race who kept alive the traditions and often the habits of a more picturesque time. A common level of interests and of social standing fostered unconventional ways of thought and speech, and friendly human sympathies. Soli-

[1] *Prelude*, Book II.

tude induced reflection, a reliance of the mind on its own resources, and individuality of character. Where everybody knew everybody, and everybody's father had known everybody's father, the interest of man in man was not likely to become a matter of cold hearsay and distant report. When death knocked at any door in the hamlet, there was an echo from every fireside, and a wedding dropt its white flowers at every threshold. There was not a grave in the churchyard but had its story; not a crag or glen or aged tree untouched with some ideal hue of legend. It was here that Wordsworth learned that homely humanity which gives such depth and sincerity to his poems. Travel, society, culture, nothing could obliterate the deep trace of that early training which enables him to speak directly to the primitive instincts of man. He was apprenticed early to the difficult art of being himself.

At school he wrote some task-verses on subjects imposed by the master, and also some voluntaries of his own, equally undistinguished by any peculiar merit. But he seems to have made up his mind as early as in his fourteenth year to become a poet.[1] "It is recorded," says his biographer vaguely, "that the poet's father set him very early to learn portions of the best English poets by heart, so that at an early age he could repeat large portions of Shakespeare, Milton, and Spenser."[2]

[1] "I to the muses have been bound,
These fourteen years, by strong indentures."
Idiot Boy (1798).

[2] I think this more than doubtful, for I find no traces of the

The great event of Wordsworth's school-days was the death of his father, who left what may be called a hypothetical estate, consisting chiefly of claims upon the first Earl of Lonsdale, the payment of which, though their justice was acknowledged, that nobleman contrived in some unexplained way to elude so long as he lived. In October, 1787, he left school for St. John's College, Cambridge. He was already, we are told, a fair Latin scholar, and had made some progress in mathematics. The earliest books we hear of his reading were Don Quixote, Gil Blas, Gulliver's Travels, and the Tale of a Tub; but at school he had also become familiar with the works of some English poets, particularly Goldsmith and Gray, of whose poems he had learned many by heart. What is more to the purpose, he had become, without knowing it, a lover of Nature in all her moods, and the same mental necessities of a solitary life which compel men to an interest in the transitory phenomena of scenery had made him also studious of the movements of his own mind, and the mutual interaction and dependence of the external and internal universe.

Doubtless his early orphanage was not without its effect in confirming a character naturally impatient of control, and his mind, left to itself, clothed itself with an indigenous growth, which grew fairly and freely, unstinted by the shadow of exotic plan-

influence of any of these poets in his earlier writings. Goldsmith was evidently his model in the *Descriptive Sketches* and the *Evening Walk*. I speak of them as originally printed.

tations. It has become a truism, that remarkable persons have remarkable mothers; but perhaps this is chiefly true of such as have made themselves distinguished by their industry, and by the assiduous cultivation of faculties in themselves of only an average quality. It is rather to be noted how little is known of the parentage of men of the first magnitude, how often they seem in some sort foundlings, and how early an apparently adverse destiny begins the culture of those who are to encounter and master great intellectual or spiritual experiences.

Of his disposition as a child little is known, but that little is characteristic. He himself tells us that he was "stiff, moody, and of violent temper." His mother said of him that he was the only one of her children about whom she felt any anxiety, — for she was sure that he would be remarkable for good or evil. Once, in resentment at some fancied injury, he resolved to kill himself, but his heart failed him. I suspect that few boys of passionate temperament have escaped these momentary suggestions of despairing helplessness. "On another occasion," he says, "while I was at my grandfather's house at Penrith, along with my eldest brother Richard, we were whipping tops together in the long drawing-room, on which the carpet was only laid down on particular occasions. The walls were hung round with family pictures, and I said to my brother, 'Dare you strike your whip through that old lady's petticoat?' He replied, 'No, I won't.' 'Then,' said I, 'here goes,' and I struck

my lash through her hooped petticoat, for which, no doubt, though I have forgotten it, I was properly punished. But, possibly from some want of judgment in punishments inflicted, I had become perverse and obstinate in defying chastisement, and rather proud of it than otherwise." This last anecdote is as happily typical as a bit of Greek mythology which always prefigured the lives of heroes in the stories of their childhood. Just so do we find him afterward striking his defiant lash through the hooped petticoat of the artificial style of poetry, and proudly unsubdued by the punishment of the Reviewers.

Of his college life the chief record is to be found in "The Prelude." He did not distinguish himself as a scholar, and if his life had any incidents, they were of that interior kind which rarely appear in biography, though they may be of controlling influence upon the life. He speaks of reading Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton while at Cambridge,[1] but no reflection from them is visible in his earliest published poems. The greater part of his vacations was spent in his native Lake-country, where his only sister, Dorothy, was the companion of his rambles. She was a woman of large natural endowments,

[1] *Prelude*, Book III. He studied Italian also at Cambridge; his teacher, whose name was Isola, had formerly taught the poet Gray. It may be pretty certainly inferred, however, that his first systematic study of English poetry was due to the copy of Anderson's *British Poets*, left with him by his sailor brother John on setting out for his last voyage in 1805. It was the daughter of this Isola, Emma, who was afterwards adopted by Charles and Mary Lamb.

chiefly of the receptive kind, and had much to do with the formation and tendency of the poet's mind. It was she who called forth the shyer sensibilities of his nature, and taught an originally harsh and austere imagination to surround itself with fancy and feeling, as the rock fringes itself with a sun-spray of ferns. She was his first Public, and belonged to that class of prophetically appreciative temperaments whose apparent office it is to cheer the early solitude of original minds with messages from the future. Through the greater part of his life she continued to be a kind of poetical conscience to him.

Wordsworth's last college vacation was spent in a foot journey upon the Continent (1790). In January, 1791, he took his degree of B. A., and left Cambridge. During the summer of this year he visited Wales, and, after declining to enter upon holy orders under the plea that he was not of age for ordination, went over to France in November, and remained during the winter at Orleans. Here he became intimate with the republican General Beaupuis, with whose hopes and aspirations he ardently sympathized. In the spring of 1792 he was at Blois, and returned thence to Orleans, which he finally quitted in October for Paris. He remained here as long as he could with safety, and at the close of the year went back to England, thus, perhaps, escaping the fate which soon after overtook his friends the Brissotins.

As hitherto the life of Wordsworth may be called a fortunate one, not less so in the training

and expansion of his faculties was this period of his stay in France. Born and reared in a country where the homely and familiar nestles confidingly amid the most savage and sublime forms of nature, he had experienced whatever impulses the creative faculty can receive from mountain and cloud and the voices of winds and waters, but he had known man only as an actor in fireside histories and tragedies, for which the hamlet supplied an ample stage. In France he first felt the authentic beat of a nation's heart; he was a spectator at one of those dramas where the terrible footfall of the Eumenides is heard nearer and nearer in the pauses of the action; and he saw man such as he can only be when he is vibrated by the orgasm of a national emotion. He sympathized with the hopes of France and of mankind deeply, as was fitting in a young man and a poet; and if his faith in the gregarious advancement of men was afterward shaken, he only held the more firmly by his belief in the individual, and his reverence for the human as something quite apart from the popular and above it. Wordsworth has been unwisely blamed, as if he had been recreant to the liberal instincts of his youth. But it was inevitable that a genius so regulated and metrical as his, a mind which always compensated itself for its artistic radicalism by an involuntary leaning toward external respectability, should recoil from whatever was convulsionary and destructive in politics, and above all in religion. He reads the poems of Wordsworth without understanding, who does not find in

them the noblest incentives to faith in man and the grandeur of his destiny, founded always upon that personal dignity and virtue, the capacity for whose attainment alone makes universal liberty possible and assures its permanence. He was to make men better by opening to them the sources of an inalterable well-being; to make them free, in a sense higher than political, by showing them that these sources are within them, and that no contrivance of man can permanently emancipate narrow natures and depraved minds. His politics were always those of a poet, circling in the larger orbit of causes and principles, careless of the transitory oscillation of events.

The change in his point of view (if change there was) certainly was complete soon after his return from France, and was perhaps due in part to the influence of Burke.

> "While he [Burke] forewarns, denounces, launches forth,
> Against all systems built on abstract rights,
> Keen ridicule; the majesty proclaims
> Of institutes and laws hallowed by time;
> Declares the vital power of social ties
> Endeared by custom; and with high disdain,
> Exploding upstart theory, insists
> Upon the allegiance to which men are born.
> . . . Could a youth, and one
> In ancient story versed, whose breast hath heaved
> Under the weight of classic eloquence,
> Sit, see, and hear, unthankful, uninspired?"[1]

[1] *Prelude*, Book VII. Written before 1805, and referring to a still earlier date. "Wordsworth went in powder, and with cocked hat under his arm, to the Marchioness of Stafford's rout." (Southey to Miss Barker, May, 1806.)

He had seen the French for a dozen years eagerly busy in tearing up whatever had roots in the past, replacing the venerable trunks of tradition and orderly growth with liberty-poles, then striving vainly to piece together the fibres they had broken, and to reproduce artificially that sense of permanence and continuity which is the main safeguard of vigorous self-consciousness in a nation. He became a Tory through intellectual conviction, retaining, I suspect, to the last, a certain radicalism of temperament and instinct. As in Carlyle, so in him something of the peasant survived to the last. Haydon tells us that in 1809 Sir George Beaumont said to him and Wilkie, "Wordsworth may perhaps walk in; if he do, I caution you both against his terrific democratic notions"; and it must have been many years later that Wordsworth himself told Crabb Robinson, "I have no respect whatever for Whigs, but I have a great deal of the Chartist in me." In 1802, during his tour in Scotland, he travelled on Sundays as on the other days of the week.[1] He afterwards became a theoretical churchgoer. "Wordsworth defended earnestly the Church establishment. He even said he would shed his blood for it. Nor was he disconcerted by a laugh raised against him on account of his having confessed that he knew not when he had been in a church in his own country. 'All our ministers are so vile,' said he. The mischief of allowing the

[1] This was probably one reason for the long suppression of Miss Wordsworth's journal, which she had evidently prepared for publication as early as 1805.

clergy to depend on the caprice of the multitude he thought more than outweighed all the evils of an establishment." [1]

In December, 1792, Wordsworth had returned to England, and in the following year published "Descriptive Sketches" and the "Evening Walk." He did this, as he says in one of his letters, to show that, although he had gained no honors at the University, he *could* do something. They met with no great success, and he afterward corrected them so much as to destroy all their interest as juvenile productions, without communicating to them any of the merits of maturity. In commenting, sixty years afterward, on a couplet in one of these poems, —

> "And, fronting the bright west, the oak entwines
> Its darkening boughs and leaves in stronger lines," —

he says: "This is feebly and imperfectly expressed, but I recollect distinctly the very spot where this first struck me. . . . The moment was important in my poetical history; for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, so far as I was acquainted with them, and I made a resolution to supply in some degree the deficiency."

It is plain that Wordsworth's memory was playing him a trick here, misled by that instinct (it may almost be called) of consistency which leads men first to desire that their lives should have been without break or seam, and then to believe that they have been such. The more distant ranges of

[1] Crabb Robinson, i. 250, Am. ed.

perspective are apt to run together in retrospection. How far could Wordsworth at fourteen have been acquainted with the poets of all ages and countries, — he who to his dying day could not endure to read Goethe and knew nothing of Calderon? It seems to me rather that the earliest influence traceable in him is that of Goldsmith, and later of Cowper, and it is, perhaps, some slight indication of its having already begun that his first volume of "Descriptive Sketches" (1793) was put forth by Johnson, who was Cowper's publisher. By and by the powerful impress of Burns is seen both in the topics of his verse and the form of his expression. But whatever the ultimate effect of these poets upon his style, certain it is that his juvenile poems were clothed in the conventional habit of the eighteenth century. "The first verses from which he remembered to have received great pleasure were Miss Carter's 'Poem on Spring,' a poem in the six-line stanza which he was particularly fond of and had composed much in, — for example, 'Ruth.'" This is noteworthy, for Wordsworth's lyric range, especially so far as tune is concerned, was always narrow. His sense of melody was painfully dull, and some of his lighter effusions, as he would have called them, are almost ludicrously wanting in grace of movement. We cannot expect in a modern poet the thrush-like improvisation, the bewitchingly impulsive cadences, that charm us in our Elizabethan drama and whose last warble died with Herrick; but Shelley, Tennyson, and Browning have shown that the simple pathos of their music was not irre-

coverable, even if the artless poignancy of their phrase be gone beyond recall. We feel this lack in Wordsworth all the more keenly if we compare such verses as

> "Like an army defeated
> The snow hath retreated
> And now doth fare ill
> On the top of the bare hill,"

with Goethe's exquisite *Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh*, in which the lines (as if shaken down by a momentary breeze of emotion) drop lingeringly one after another like blossoms upon turf.

The "Evening Walk" and "Descriptive Sketches" show plainly the prevailing influence of Goldsmith, both in the turn of thought and the mechanism of the verse. They lack altogether the temperance of tone and judgment in selection which have made the "Traveller" and the "Deserted Village," perhaps, the most truly classical poems in the language. They bear here and there, however, the unmistakable stamp of the maturer Wordsworth, not only in a certain blunt realism, but in the intensity and truth of picturesque epithet. Of this realism, from which Wordsworth never wholly freed himself, the following verses may suffice as a specimen. After describing the fate of a chamois-hunter killed by falling from a crag, his fancy goes back to the bereaved wife and son: —

> "Haply that child in fearful doubt may gaze,
> Passing his father's bones in future days,
> Start at the reliques of that very thigh
> On which so oft he prattled when a boy."

In these poems there is plenty of that "poetic diction" against which Wordsworth was to lead the revolt nine years later.

> "To wet the peak's impracticable sides
> He opens of his feet the sanguine tides,
> Weak and more weak the issuing current eyes
> Lapped by the panting tongue of thirsty skies."

Both of these passages have disappeared from the revised edition, as well as some curious outbursts of that motiveless despair which Byron made fashionable not long after. Nor are there wanting touches of fleshliness which strike us oddly as coming from Wordsworth.[1]

> "Farewell! those forms that in thy noontide shade
> Rest near their little plots of oaten glade,
> Those steadfast eyes that beating breasts inspire
> To throw the 'sultry ray' of young Desire;
> Those lips whose tides of fragrance come and go
> Accordant to the cheek's unquiet glow;
> Those shadowy breasts in love's soft light arrayed,
> And rising by the moon of passion swayed."

The political tone is also mildened in the revision, as where he changes "despot courts" into "tyranny." One of the alterations is interesting. In the "Evening Walk" he had originally written

> "And bids her soldier come her wars to share
> Asleep on Minden's charnel hill afar."

An *erratum* at the end directs us to correct the second verse, thus: —

[1] Wordsworth's purity afterwards grew sensitive almost to prudery. The late Mr. Clough told me that he heard him at Dr. Arnold's table denounce the first line in Keats's *Ode to a Grecian Urn* as indecent, and Haydon records that when he saw the group of Cupid and Psyche he exclaimed, "The dev-ils!"

"Asleep on Bunker's charnel hill afar."[1]

Wordsworth somewhere rebukes the poets for making the owl a bodeful bird. He had himself done so in the "Evening Walk," and corrects his epithets to suit his later judgment, putting "gladsome" for "boding," and replacing

"The tremulous sob of the complaining owl"

by

"The sportive outcry of the mocking owl."

Indeed, the character of the two poems is so much changed in the revision as to make the dates appended to them a misleading anachronism. But there is one truly Wordsworthian passage which already gives us a glimpse of that passion with which he was the first to irradiate descriptive poetry, and which sets him on a level with Turner.

"'T is storm; and hid in mist from hour to hour
All day the floods a deepening murmur pour;
The sky is veiled and every cheerful sight;
Dark is the region as with coming night;
But what a sudden burst of overpowering light!
Triumphant on the bosom of the storm,
Glances the fire-clad eagle's wheeling form;
Eastward, in long prospective glittering shine
The wood-crowned cliffs that o'er the lake recline;
Those eastern cliffs a hundred streams unfold,
At once to pillars turned that flame with gold;
Behind his sail the peasant tries to shun
The West that burns like one dilated sun,
Where in a mighty crucible expire
The mountains, glowing hot like coals of fire."

[1] The whole passage is omitted in the revised edition. The original, a quarto pamphlet, is now very rare, but fortunately Charles Lamb's copy of it is now owned by my friend Professor C. E. Norton.

Wordsworth has made only one change in these verses, and that for the worse, by substituting "glorious" (which was already implied in "glances" and "fireclad") for "wheeling." In later life he would have found it hard to forgive the man who should have made cliffs recline over a lake. On the whole, what strikes us as most prophetic in these poems is their want of continuity, and the purple patches of true poetry on a texture of unmistakable prose; perhaps we might add the incongruous clothing of prose thoughts in the ceremonial robes of poesy.

During the same year (1793) he wrote, but did not publish, a political tract, in which he avowed himself opposed to monarchy and to the hereditary principle, and desirous of a republic, if it could be had without a revolution. He probably continued to be all his life in favor of that ideal republic "which never was on land or sea," but fortunately he gave up politics that he might devote himself to his own nobler calling, to which politics are subordinate, and for which he found freedom enough in England as it was.[1] Dr. Wordsworth admits that

[1] Wordsworth showed his habitual good sense in never sharing, so far as is known, the communistic dreams of his friends Coleridge and Southey. The latter of the two had, to be sure, renounced them shortly after his marriage, and before his acquaintance with Wordsworth began. But Coleridge seems to have clung to them longer. There is a passage in one of his letters to Cottle (without date, but apparently written in the spring of 1798) which would imply that Wordsworth had been accused of some kind of social heresy. "Wordsworth has been caballed against *so long and so loudly* that he has found it impossible to prevail on the tenant of the Allfoxden estate to let him the house after their first

his uncle's opinions were democratical so late as 1802. I suspect that they remained so in an esoteric way to the end of his days. He had himself suffered by the arbitrary selfishness of a great landholder, and he was born and bred in a part of England where there is a greater social equality than elsewhere. The look and manner of the Cumberland people especially are such as recall very vividly to a New Englander the associations of fifty years ago, ere the change from New England to New Ireland had begun. But meanwhile, Want, which makes no distinctions of Monarchist or Republican, was pressing upon him. The debt due to his father's estate had not been paid, and Wordsworth was one of those rare idealists who esteem it the first duty of a friend of humanity to live for, and not on, his neighbor. He at first proposed establishing a periodical journal to be called "The Philanthropist," but luckily went no further with it, for the receipts from an organ of opinion which professed republicanism, and at the same time discountenanced the plans of all existing or defunct republicans, would have been necessarily scanty. There being no appearance of any demand, present or prospective, for philanthropists, he tried to get

agreement is expired." Perhaps, after all, it was Wordsworth's insulation of character and habitual want of sympathy with anything but the moods of his own mind that rendered him incapable of this copartnery of enthusiasm. He appears to have regarded even his sister Dorothy (whom he certainly loved as much as it was possible for him to love anything but his own poems) as a kind of tributary dependency of his genius, much as a mountain might look down on one of its ancillary spurs.

employment as correspondent of a newspaper. Here also it was impossible that he should succeed; he was too great to be merged in the editorial We, and had too well defined a private opinion on all subjects to be able to express that average of public opinion which constitutes able editorials. But so it is that to the prophet in the wilderness the birds of ill omen are already on the wing with food from heaven; and while Wordsworth's relatives were getting impatient at what they considered his waste of time, while one thought he had gifts enough to make a good parson, and another lamented the rare attorney that was lost in him,[1] the prescient muse guided the hand of Raisley Calvert while he wrote

[1] Speaking to one of his neighbors in 1845 he said, "that, after he had finished his college course, he was in great doubt as to what his future employment should be. He did not feel himself good enough for the Church; he felt that his mind was not properly disciplined for that holy office, and that the struggle between his conscience and his impulses would have made life a torture. He also shrank from the Law, although Southey often told him that he was well fitted for the higher parts of the profession. He had studied military history with great interest, and the strategy of war; and he always fancied that he had talents for command; and he at one time thought of a military life, but then he was without connections, and he felt, if he were ordered to the West Indies, his talents would not save him from the yellow-fever, and he gave that up." (*Memoirs*, ii. 466.) It is curious to fancy Wordsworth a soldier. Certain points of likeness between him and Wellington have often struck me. They resemble each other in practical good sense, fidelity to duty, courage, and also in a kind of precise uprightness which made their personal character somewhat uninteresting. But what was decorum in Wellington was piety in Wordsworth, and the entire absence of imagination (the great point of dissimilarity) perhaps helped as much as anything to make Wellington a great commander.

the poet's name in his will for a legacy of £900. By the death of Calvert, in 1795, this timely help came to Wordsworth at the turning-point of his life, and made it honest for him to write poems that will never die, instead of theatrical critiques as ephemeral as play-bills, or leaders that led only to oblivion.

In the autumn of 1795 Wordsworth and his sister took up their abode at Racedown Lodge, near Crewkerne, in Dorsetshire. Here nearly two years were passed, chiefly in the study of poetry, and Wordsworth to some extent recovered from the fierce disappointment of his political dreams, and regained that equable tenor of mind which alone is consistent with a healthy productiveness. Here Coleridge, who had contrived to see something more in the "Descriptive Sketches" than the public had discovered there, first made his acquaintance. The sympathy and appreciation of an intellect like Coleridge's supplied him with that external motive to activity which is the chief use of popularity, and justified to him his opinion of his own powers. It was now that the tragedy of "The Borderers" was for the most part written, and that plan of the "Lyrical Ballads" suggested which gave Wordsworth a clue to lead him out of the metaphysical labyrinth in which he was entangled. It was agreed between the two young friends, that Wordsworth was to be a philosophic poet, and, by a good fortune uncommon to such conspiracies, Nature had already consented to the arrangement. In July, 1797, the two Wordsworths

removed to Allfoxden in Somersetshire, that they might be near Coleridge, who in the mean while had married and settled himself at Nether-Stowey. In November "The Borderers" was finished, and Wordsworth went up to London with his sister to offer it for the stage. The good Genius of the poet again interposing, the play was decisively rejected, and Wordsworth went back to Allfoxden, himself the hero of that first tragi-comedy so common to young authors.

The play has fine passages, but is as unreal as "Jane Eyre." It shares with many of Wordsworth's narrative poems the defect of being written to illustrate an abstract moral theory, so that the overbearing thesis is continually thrusting the poetry to the wall. Applied to the drama, such predestination makes all the personages puppets and disenables them for being characters. Wordsworth seems to have felt this when he published "The Borderers" in 1842, and says in a note that it was "at first written . . . without any view to its exhibition upon the stage." But he was mistaken. The contemporaneous letters of Coleridge to Cottle show that he was long in giving up the hope of getting it accepted by some theatrical manager.

He now applied himself to the preparation of the first volume of the "Lyrical Ballads" for the press, and it was published toward the close of 1798. The book, which contained also "The Ancient Mariner" of Coleridge, attracted little notice, and that in great part contemptuous. When Mr. Cottle, the publisher, shortly after sold his copy-

rights to Mr. Longman, that of the "Lyrical Ballads" was reckoned at *zero*, and it was at last given up to the authors. A few persons were not wanting, however, who discovered the dawn-streaks of a new day in that light which the critical fire-brigade thought to extinguish with a few contemptuous spurts of cold water.[1]

Lord Byron describes himself as waking one morning and finding himself famous, and it is quite an ordinary fact that a blaze may be made with a little saltpetre that will be stared at by thousands who would have thought the sunrise tedious. If we may believe his biographer, Wordsworth might have said that he awoke and found himself in-famous, for the publication of the "Lyrical Ballads" undoubtedly raised him to the distinction of being the least popular poet in England. Parnassus has two peaks; the one where improvising poets cluster; the other where the singer of deep secrets sits alone, — a peak veiled sometimes from the whole morning of a generation by earth-born mists and

[1] Cottle says, "The sale was so slow and the severity of most of the reviews so great that its progress to oblivion seemed to be certain." But the notices in the *Monthly* and *Critical* reviews (then the most influential) were fair, and indeed favorable, especially to Wordsworth's share in the volume. The *Monthly* says, "So much genius and originality are discovered in this publication that we wish to see another from the same hand." The *Critical*, after saying that "in the whole range of English poetry we scarcely recollect anything superior to a passage in *Lines written near Tintern Abbey*," sums up thus: "Yet every piece discovers genius; and ill as the author has frequently employed his talents, they certainly rank him with the best of living poets." Such treatment surely cannot be called discouraging.

smoke of kitchen fires, only to glow the more consciously at sunset, and after nightfall to crown itself with imperishable stars. Wordsworth had that self-trust which in the man of genius is sublime, and in the man of talent insufferable. It mattered not to him though all the reviewers had been in a chorus of laughter or a conspiracy of silence behind him. He went quietly over to Germany to write more Lyrical Ballads, and to begin a poem on the growth of his own mind, at a time when there were only two men in the world (himself and Coleridge) who were aware that he had one in anywise differing from those, mechanically uniform, which are stuck drearily, side by side, in the great pin-paper of society.

In Germany Wordsworth dined in company with Klopstock, and after dinner they had a conversation, of which Wordsworth took notes. The respectable old poet, who was passing the evening of his days by the chimney-corner, Darby and Joan like, with his respectable Muse, seems to have been rather bewildered by the apparition of a living genius. The record is of value now chiefly for the insight it gives us into Wordsworth's mind. Among other things he said, "that it was the province of a great poet to raise people up to his own level, not to descend to theirs," — memorable words, the more memorable that a literary life of sixty years was in keeping with them.

It would be instructive to know what were Wordsworth's studies during his winter in Goslar. De Quincey's statement is mere conjecture. It

may be guessed fairly enough that he would seek an entrance to the German language by the easy path of the ballad, a course likely to confirm him in his theories as to the language of poetry. The Spinozism with which he has been not unjustly charged was certainly not due to any German influence, for it appears unmistakably in the "Lines composed at Tintern Abbey" in July, 1798. It is more likely to have been derived from his talks with Coleridge in 1797.[1] When Emerson visited him in 1833, he spoke with loathing of "Wilhelm Meister," a part of which he had read in Carlyle's translation apparently. There was some affectation in this, it should seem, for he had read Smollett. On the whole, it may be fairly concluded that the help of Germany in the development of his genius may be reckoned as very small, though there is certainly a marked resemblance both in form and sentiment between some of his earlier lyrics and those of Goethe. His poem of the "Thorn," though vastly more imaginative, may have been suggested by Bürger's *Pfarrer's Tochter von Taubenhain.* The little grave *drei Spannen lang,* in its conscientious measurement, certainly recalls a famous couplet in the English poem.

After spending the winter at Goslar, Wordsworth and his sister returned to England in the

[1] A very improbable story of Coleridge's in the *Biographia Literaria* represents the two friends as having incurred a suspicion of treasonable dealings with the French enemy by their constant references to a certain "Spy Nosey." The story at least seems to show how they pronounced the name, which was exactly in accordance with the usage of the last generation in New England.

spring of 1799, and settled at Grasmere in Westmoreland. In 1800, the first edition of the "Lyrical Ballads" being exhausted, it was republished with the addition of another volume, Mr. Longman paying £100 for the copyright of two editions. The book passed to a second edition in 1802, and to a third in 1805.[1] Wordsworth sent a copy of it, with a manly letter, to Mr. Fox, particularly recommending to his attention the poems "Michael" and "The Brothers," as displaying the strength and permanence among a simple and rural population of those domestic affections which were certain to decay gradually under the influence of manufactories and poor-houses. Mr. Fox wrote a civil acknowledgment, saying that his favorites among the poems were "Harry Gill," "We are Seven," "The Mad Mother," and "The Idiot," but that he was prepossessed against the use of blank-verse for simple subjects. Any political significance in the poems he was apparently unable to see. To this second edition Wordsworth prefixed an argumentative Preface, in which he nailed to the door of the cathedral of English song the critical theses which he was to maintain against all comers in his poetry and his life. It was a new thing for an author to undertake to show the good-

[1] Wordsworth found (as other original minds have since done) a hearing in America sooner than in England. James Humphreys, a Philadelphia bookseller, was encouraged by a sufficient *list of subscribers* to reprint the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. The second English edition, however, having been published before he had wholly completed his reprinting, was substantially followed in the first American, which was published in 1802.

ness of his verses by the logic and learning of his prose; but Wordsworth carried to the reform of poetry all that fervor and faith which had lost their political object, and it is another proof of the sincerity and greatness of his mind, and of that heroic simplicity which is their concomitant, that he could do so calmly what was sure to seem ludicrous to the greater number of his readers. Fifty years have since demonstrated that the true judgment of one man outweighs any counterpoise of false judgment, and that the faith of mankind is guided to a man only by a well-founded faith in himself. To this *Defensio* Wordsworth afterward added a supplement, and the two form a treatise of permanent value for philosophic statement and decorous English. Their only ill effect has been, that they have encouraged many otherwise deserving young men to set a Sibylline value on their verses in proportion as they were unsalable. The strength of an argument for self-reliance drawn from the example of a great man depends wholly on the greatness of him who uses it; such arguments being like coats of mail, which, though they serve the strong against arrow-flights and lance-thrusts, may only suffocate the weak or sink him the sooner in the waters of oblivion.

An advertisement prefixed to the "Lyrical Ballads," as originally published in one volume, warned the reader that "they were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far *the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes* of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure."

In his preface to the second edition, in two volumes, Wordsworth already found himself forced to shift his ground a little (perhaps in deference to the wider view and finer sense of Coleridge), and now says of the former volume that "it was published as an experiment which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement, *a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation*, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted which a poet may *rationally endeavor* to impart."[1] Here is evidence of a retreat towards a safer position, though Wordsworth seems to have remained unconvinced at heart, and for many years longer clung obstinately to the passages of bald prose into which his original theory had betrayed him. In 1815 his opinions had undergone a still further change, and an assiduous study of the qualities of his own mind and of his own poetic method (the two subjects in which alone he was ever a thorough scholar) had convinced him that poetry was in no sense that appeal to the understanding which is implied by the words "rationally endeavor to impart." In the preface of that year he says, "The observations prefixed to that portion of these volumes which was published many years ago under the title of 'Lyrical Ballads' have so little of special application to the greater part of the present enlarged and diversified collection, that they could

[1] Some of the weightiest passages in this Preface, as it is now printed, were inserted without notice of date in the edition of 1815.

not with propriety stand as an introduction to it." It is a pity that he could not have become an earlier convert to Coleridge's pithy definition, that "prose was words in their best order, and poetry the *best* words in the best order." But idealization was something that Wordsworth was obliged to learn painfully. It did not come to him naturally, as to Spenser and Shelley, and to Coleridge in his higher moods. Moreover, it was in the too frequent choice of subjects incapable of being idealized without a manifest jar between theme and treatment that Wordsworth's great mistake lay. For example, in "The Blind Highland Boy" he had originally the following stanzas: —

> "Strong is the current, but be mild,
> Ye waves, and spare the helpless child!
> If ye in anger fret or chafe,
> A bee-hive would be ship as safe
> As that in which he sails.
>
> "But say, what was it? Thought of fear!
> Well may ye tremble when ye hear!
> — A household tub like one of those
> Which women use to wash their clothes,
> This carried the blind boy."

In endeavoring to get rid of the downright vulgarity of phrase in the last stanza, Wordsworth invents an impossible tortoise-shell, and thus robs his story of the reality which alone gave it a living interest. Any extemporized raft would have floated the boy down to immortality. But Wordsworth never quite learned the distinction between Fact, which suffocates the Muse, and Truth, which is the very breath of her nostrils. Study and self-culture

did much for him, but they never quite satisfied him that he was capable of making a mistake. He yielded silently to friendly remonstrance on certain points, and gave up, for example, the ludicrous exactness of

> "I 've measured it from side to side,
> 'T is three feet long and two feet wide."

But I doubt if he was ever really convinced, and to his dying day he could never quite shake off that habit of over-minute detail which renders the narratives of uncultivated people so tedious, and sometimes so distasteful.[1] "Simon Lee," after his latest revision, still contains verses like these: —

> "And he is lean and he is sick;
> His body, dwindled and awry,
> Rests upon ankles swollen and thick;
> His legs are thin and dry;
> . . . . . .
> Few months of life he has in store,
> As he to you will tell,
> For still, the more he works, the more
> Do his weak ankles swell," —

which are not only prose, but *bad* prose, and moreover guilty of the same fault for which Wordsworth condemned Dr. Johnson's famous parody on the ballad-style, — that their "*matter* is contemptible." The sonorousness of conviction with which

[1] "On my alluding to the line,

'Three feet long and two feet wide,'

and confessing that I dared not read them aloud in company, he said, 'They ought to be liked.'" (Crabb Robinson, 9th May, 1815.) His ordinary answer to criticisms was that he considered the power to appreciate the passage criticised as a test of the critic's capacity to judge of poetry at all.

Wordsworth sometimes gives utterance to commonplaces of thought and trivialities of sentiment has a ludicrous effect on the profane and even on the faithful in unguarded moments. We are reminded of a passage in "The Excursion": —

> "List! I heard
> From yon huge breast of rock *a solemn bleat*,
> *Sent forth as if it were the mountain's voice.*"

In 1800 the friendship of Wordsworth with Lamb began, and was thenceforward never interrupted. He continued to live at Grasmere, conscientiously diligent in the composition of poems, secure of finding the materials of glory within and around him; for his genius taught him that inspiration is no product of a foreign shore, and that no adventurer ever found it, though he wandered as long as Ulysses. Meanwhile the appreciation of the best minds and the gratitude of the purest hearts gradually centred more and more towards him. In 1802 he made a short visit to France, in company with Miss Wordsworth, and soon after his return to England was married to Mary Hutchinson, on the 4th of October of the same year. Of the good fortune of this marriage no other proof is needed than the purity and serenity of his poems, and its record is to be sought nowhere else.

On the 18th of June, 1803, his first child, John, was born, and on the 14th of August of the same year he set out with his sister on a foot journey into Scotland. Coleridge was their companion during a part of this excursion, of which Miss Wordsworth kept a full diary. In Scotland he

made the acquaintance of Scott, who recited to him a part of the "Lay of the Last Minstrel," then in manuscript. The travellers returned to Grasmere on the 25th of September. It was during this year that Wordsworth's intimacy with the excellent Sir George Beaumont began. Sir George was an amateur painter of considerable merit, and his friendship was undoubtedly of service to Wordsworth in making him familiar with the laws of a sister art and thus contributing to enlarge the sympathies of his criticism, the tendency of which was toward too great exclusiveness. Sir George Beaumont, dying in 1827, did not forego his regard for the poet, but contrived to hold his affection in mortmain by the legacy of an annuity of £100, to defray the charges of a yearly journey.

In March, 1805, the poet's brother, John, lost his life by the shipwreck of the Abergavenny East-Indiaman, of which he was captain. He was a man of great purity and integrity, and sacrificed himself to his sense of duty by refusing to leave the ship till it was impossible to save him. Wordsworth was deeply attached to him, and felt such grief at his death as only solitary natures like his are capable of, though mitigated by a sense of the heroism which was the cause of it. The need of mental activity as affording an outlet to intense emotion may account for the great productiveness of this and the following year. He now completed "The Prelude," wrote "The Wagoner," and increased the number of his smaller poems enough to fill two volumes, which were published in 1807.

This collection, which contained some of the most beautiful of his shorter pieces, and among others the incomparable Odes to Duty and on Immortality, did not reach a second edition till 1815. The reviewers had another laugh, and rival poets pillaged while they scoffed, particularly Byron, among whose verses a bit of Wordsworth showed as incongruously as a sacred vestment on the back of some buccaneering plunderer of an abbey.[1] There was a general combination to put him down, but on the other hand there was a powerful party in his favor, consisting of William Wordsworth. He not only continued in good heart himself, but, reversing the order usual on such occasions, kept up the spirits of his friends.[2] Meanwhile the

[1] Byron, then in his twentieth year, wrote a review of these volumes, not, on the whole, unfair. Crabb Robinson is reported as saying that Wordsworth was indignant at the *Edinburgh Review's* attack on *Hours of Idleness*. "The young man will do something if he goes on," he said.

[2] The Rev. Dr. Wordsworth has encumbered the memory of his uncle with two volumes of *Memoirs*, which for confused dreariness are only matched by the Rev. Mark Noble's *History of the Protectorate House of Cromwell*. It is a misfortune that his materials were not put into the hands of Professor Reed, whose notes to the American edition are among the most valuable parts of it, as they certainly are the clearest. The book contains, however, some valuable letters of Wordsworth; and those relating to this part of his life should be read by every student of his works, for the light they throw upon the principles which governed him in the composition of his poems. In a letter to Lady Beaumont (May 21, 1807) he says, "Trouble not yourself upon their present reception; of what moment is that compared with what I trust is their destiny! — to console the afflicted, to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age, to see, to think and feel,

higher order of minds among his contemporaries had descried and acknowledged him. They see their peer over the mist and lower summits between.

> "When Plinlimmon hath a cap,
> Snowdon wots well of that."

Wordsworth passed the winter of 1806–7 in a house of Sir George Beaumont's, at Coleorton in Leicestershire, the cottage at Grasmere having become too small for his increased family. On his return to the Vale of Grasmere he rented the house at Allan Bank, where he lived three years. During this period he appears to have written very little poetry, for which his biographer assigns as a primary reason the smokiness of the Allan Bank chimneys. This will hardly account for the failure of the summer crop, especially as Wordsworth composed chiefly in the open air. It did not prevent him from writing a pamphlet upon the Convention of Cintra, which was published too late to attract

and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous; this is their office, which I trust they will faithfully perform long after we (that is, all that is mortal of us) are mouldered in our graves. . . . To conclude, my ears are stone-dead to this idle buzz [of hostile criticism], and my flesh as insensible as iron to these petty stings; and, after what I have said, I am sure yours will be the same. I doubt not that you will share with me an invincible confidence that my writings (and among them these little poems) will coöperate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society wherever found; and that they will in their degree be efficacious in making men wiser, better, and happier." Here is an odd reversal of the ordinary relation between an unpopular poet and his little public of admirers; it is he who keeps up their spirits, and supplies them with faith from his own inexhaustible cistern.

much attention, though Lamb says that its effect upon him was like that which one of Milton's tracts might have had upon a contemporary.[1] It was at Allan Bank that Coleridge dictated "The Friend," and Wordsworth contributed to it two essays, one in answer to a letter of Mathetes[2] (Professor Wilson), and the other on Epitaphs, republished in the Notes to "The Excursion." Here also he wrote his "Description of the Scenery of the Lakes." Perhaps a truer explanation of the comparative silence of Wordsworth's Muse during these years is to be found in the intense interest which he took in current events, whose variety, picturesqueness, and historical significance were enough to absorb all the energies of his imagination.

In the spring of 1811 Wordsworth removed to the Parsonage at Grasmere. Here he remained two years, and here he had his second intimate experience of sorrow in the loss of two of his children, Catharine and Thomas, one of whom died 4th June, and the other 1st December, 1812.[3] Early in 1813

[1] "Wordsworth's pamphlet will fail of producing any general effect, because the sentences are long and involved; and his friend De Quincey, who corrected the press, has rendered them more obscure by an unusual system of punctuation." (Southey to Scott, 30th July, 1809.) The tract is, as Southey hints, heavy.

[2] The first essay in the third volume of the second edition.

[3] Wordsworth's children were, —

John, born 18th June, 1803, a clergyman.

Dorothy, born 16th August, 1804; died 9th July, 1847.

Thomas, born 16th June, 1806; died 1st December, 1812.

Catharine, born 6th September, 1808; died 4th June, 1812.

William, born 12th May, 1810; succeeded his father as Stamp-Distributor.

he bought Rydal Mount, and, having removed thither, changed his abode no more during the rest of his life. In March of this year he was appointed Distributor of Stamps for the county of Westmoreland, an office whose receipts rendered him independent, and whose business he was able to do by deputy, thus leaving him ample leisure for nobler duties. De Quincey speaks of this appointment as an instance of the remarkable good luck which waited upon Wordsworth through his whole life. In our view it is only another illustration of that scripture which describes the righteous as never forsaken. Good luck is the willing handmaid of upright, energetic character, and conscientious observance of duty. Wordsworth owed his nomination to the friendly exertions of the Earl of Lonsdale, who desired to atone as far as might be for the injustice of the first Earl, and who respected the honesty of the man more than he appreciated the originality of the poet.[1] The Collectorship at Whitehaven (a more lucrative office) was afterwards offered to Wordsworth, and declined. He had enough for independence, and wished nothing more. Still later, on the death of the Stamp-Distributor for Cumberland, a part of that district was annexed to Westmoreland, and

[1] Good luck (in the sense of *Chance*) seems properly to be the occurrence of Opportunity to one who has neither deserved nor knows how to use it. In such hands it commonly turns to ill luck. Moore's Bermudan appointment is an instance of it. Wordsworth had a sound common-sense and practical conscientiousness, which enabled him to fill his office as well as Dr. Franklin could have done. A fitter man could not have been found in Westmoreland.

Wordsworth's income was raised to something more than £1,000 a year.

In 1814 he made his second tour in Scotland, visiting Yarrow in company with the Ettrick Shepherd. During this year "The Excursion" was published, in an edition of five hundred copies, which supplied the demand for six years. Another edition of the same number of copies was published in 1827, and not exhausted till 1834. In 1815 "The White Doe of Rylstone" appeared, and in 1816 "A Letter to a Friend of Burns," in which Wordsworth gives his opinion upon the limits to be observed by the biographers of literary men. It contains many valuable suggestions, but allows hardly scope enough for personal details, to which he was constitutionally indifferent.[1] Nearly the same date may be ascribed to a rhymed translation of the first three books of the Æneid, a specimen of which was printed in the Cambridge "Philological Museum" (1832). In 1819 "Peter Bell," written twenty years before, was published, and, perhaps in consequence of the ridicule of the reviewers, found a more rapid sale than any of his previous volumes. "The Wagoner," printed in the same year, was less successful. His next publication was the volume of Sonnets on the river Duddon, with some miscellaneous poems, 1820. A tour on the Continent in 1820 furnished the subjects for another collection, published in 1822. This was followed in the same year by the volume of "Eccle-

[1] "I am not one who much or oft delight
In personal talk."

siastical Sketches." His subsequent publications were "Yarrow Revisited," 1835, and the tragedy of "The Borderers," 1842.

During all these years his fame was increasing slowly but steadily, and his age gathered to itself the reverence and the troops of friends which his poems and the nobly simple life reflected in them deserved. Public honors followed private appreciation. In 1838 the University of Dublin conferred upon him the degree of D. C. L. In 1839 Oxford did the same, and the reception of the poet (now in his seventieth year) at the University was enthusiastic. In 1842 he resigned his office of Stamp-Distributor, and Sir Robert Peel had the honor of putting him upon the civil list for a pension of £300. In 1843 he was appointed Laureate, with the express understanding that it was a tribute of respect, involving no duties except such as might be self-imposed. His only official production was an Ode for the installation of Prince Albert as Chancellor of the University of Cambridge. His life was prolonged yet seven years, almost, it should seem, that he might receive that honor which he had truly conquered for himself by the unflinching bravery of a literary life of half a century, unparalleled for the scorn with which its labors were received, and the victorious acknowledgment which at last crowned them. Surviving nearly all his contemporaries, he had, if ever any man had, a foretaste of immortality, enjoying in a sort his own posthumous renown, for the hardy slowness of its growth gave a safe pledge of its durability. He

died on the 23d of April, 1850, the anniversary of the death of Shakespeare.

We have thus briefly sketched the life of Wordsworth, — a life uneventful even for a man of letters; a life like that of an oak, of quiet self-development, throwing out stronger roots toward the side whence the prevailing storm-blasts blow, and of tougher fibre in proportion to the rocky nature of the soil in which it grows. The life and growth of his mind, and the influences which shaped it, are to be looked for, even more than is the case with most poets, in his works, for he deliberately recorded them there.

Of his personal characteristics little is related. He was somewhat above the middle height, but, according to De Quincey, of indifferent figure, the shoulders being narrow and drooping. His finest feature was the eye, which was gray and full of spiritual light. Leigh Hunt says: "I never beheld eyes that looked so inspired, so supernatural. They were like fires, half burning, half smouldering, with a sort of acrid fixture of regard. One might imagine Ezekiel or Isaiah to have had such eyes." Southey tells us that he had no sense of smell, and Haydon that he had none of form. The best likeness of him, in De Quincey's judgment, is the portrait of Milton prefixed to Richardson's notes on Paradise Lost. He was active in his habits, composing in the open air, and generally dictating his poems. His daily life was regular, simple, and frugal; his manners were dignified and kindly; and in his letters and recorded conversations it is

remarkable how little that was personal entered into his judgment of contemporaries.

The true rank of Wordsworth among poets is, perhaps, not even yet to be fairly estimated, so hard is it to escape into the quiet hall of judgment uninflamed by the tumult of partisanship which besets the doors.

Coming to manhood, predetermined to be a great poet, at a time when the artificial school of poetry was enthroned with all the authority of long succession and undisputed legitimacy, it was almost inevitable that Wordsworth, who, both by nature and judgment was a rebel against the existing order, should become a partisan. Unfortunately, he became not only the partisan of a system, but of William Wordsworth as its representative. Right in general principle, he thus necessarily became wrong in particulars. Justly convinced that greatness only achieves its ends by implicitly obeying its own instincts, he perhaps reduced the following his instincts too much to a system, mistook his own resentments for the promptings of his natural genius, and, compelling principle to the measure of his own temperament or even of the controversial exigency of the moment, fell sometimes into the error of making naturalness itself artificial. If a poet resolve to be original, it will end commonly in his being merely peculiar.

Wordsworth himself departed more and more in practice, as he grew older, from the theories which he had laid down in his prefaces;[1] but those theo-

[1] How far he swung backward toward the school under whose

ries undoubtedly had a great effect in retarding the growth of his fame. He had carefully constructed a pair of spectacles through which his earlier poems were to be studied, and the public insisted on looking through them at his mature works, and were consequently unable to see fairly what required a different focus. He forced his readers to come to his poetry with a certain amount of conscious preparation, and thus gave them beforehand the impression of something like mechanical artifice, and deprived them of the contented repose of implicit faith. To the child a watch seems to be a living creature; but Wordsworth would not let his readers be children, and did injustice to himself by giving them an uneasy doubt whether creations which

influence he grew up, and toward the style against which he had protested so vigorously, a few examples will show. The advocate of the language of common life has a verse in his *Thanksgiving Ode* which, if one met with it by itself, he would think the achievement of some later copyist of Pope: —

"While the *tubed engine* [the organ] feels the inspiring blast."

And in *The Italian Itinerant and the Swiss Goatherd* we find a thermometer or barometer called

"The well-wrought scale
Whose sentient tube instructs to time
A purpose to a fickle clime."

Still worse in the *Eclipse of the Sun*, 1821: —

"High on her speculative tower
Stood Science, waiting for the hour
When Sol was destined to endure
That darkening."

So in *The Excursion*,

"The cold March wind raised in her tender throat
Viewless obstructions."

really throbbed with the very heart's-blood of genius, and were alive with nature's life of life, were not contrivances of wheels and springs. A naturalness which we are told to expect has lost the crowning grace of nature. The men who walked in Cornelius Agrippa's visionary gardens had probably no more pleasurable emotion than that of a shallow wonder, or an equally shallow self-satisfaction in thinking they had hit upon the secret of the thaumaturgy; but to a tree that has grown as God willed we come without a theory and with no botanical predilections, enjoying it simply and thankfully; or the Imagination recreates for us its past summers and winters, the birds that have nested and sung in it, the sheep that have clustered in its shade, the winds that have visited it, the cloudbergs that have drifted over it, and the snows that have ermined it in winter. The Imagination is a faculty that flouts at foreordination, and Wordsworth seemed to do all he could to cheat his readers of her company by laying out paths with a peremptory *Do not step off the gravel!* at the opening of each, and preparing pitfalls for every conceivable emotion, with guide-boards to tell each when and where it must be caught.

But if these things stood in the way of immediate appreciation, he had another theory which interferes more seriously with the total and permanent effect of his poems. He was theoretically determined not only to be a philosophic poet, but to be a *great* philosophic poet, and to this end he must produce an epic. Leaving aside the question

whether the epic be obsolete or not, it may be doubted whether the history of a single man's mind is universal enough in its interest to furnish all the requirements of the epic machinery, and it may be more than doubted whether a poet's philosophy be ordinary metaphysics, divisible into chapter and section. It is rather something which is more energetic in a word than in a whole treatise, and our hearts unclose themselves instinctively at its simple *Open sesame!* while they would stand firm against the reading of the whole body of philosophy. In point of fact, the one element of greatness which "The Excursion" possesses indisputably is heaviness. It is only the episodes that are universally read, and the effect of these is diluted by the connecting and accompanying lectures on metaphysics. Wordsworth had his epic mould to fill, and, like Benvenuto Cellini in casting his Perseus, was forced to throw in everything, debasing the metal lest it should run short. Separated from the rest, the episodes are perfect poems in their kind, and without example in the language.

Wordsworth, like most solitary men of strong minds, was a good critic of the substance of poetry, but somewhat niggardly in the allowance he made for those subsidiary qualities which make it the charmer of leisure and the employment of minds without definite object. It may be doubted, indeed, whether he set much store by any contemporary writing but his own, and whether he did not look upon poetry too exclusively as an exercise rather of the intellect than as a nepenthe of the

imagination.[1] He says of himself, speaking of his youth: —

> "In fine,
> I was a better judge of thoughts than words,
> Misled in estimating words, not only
> By common inexperience of youth,
> But by the trade in classic niceties,
> The dangerous craft of culling term and phrase
> From languages that want the living voice
> To carry meaning to the natural heart;
> To tell us what is passion, what is truth,
> What reason, what simplicity and sense." [2]

Though he here speaks in the preterite tense, this was always true of him, and his thought seems often to lean upon a word too weak to bear its weight. No reader of adequate insight can help regretting that he did not earlier give himself to "the trade of classic niceties." It was precisely this which gives to the blank-verse of Landor the severe dignity and reserved force which alone among later poets recall the tune of Milton, and to which Wordsworth never attained. Indeed, Wordsworth's blank-verse (though the passion be profounder) is always essentially that of Cowper. They were alike also in their love of outward nature and of simple things. The main difference between them is one of scenery rather than of sentiment, between the life-long familiar of the mountains and the dweller on the plain.

It cannot be denied that in Wordsworth the very highest powers of the poetic mind were asso-

[1] According to Landor, he pronounced all Scott's poetry to be "not worth five shillings."

[2] *Prelude*, Book VI.

ciated with a certain tendency to the diffuse and commonplace. It is in the understanding (always prosaic) that the great golden veins of his imagination are imbedded.[1] He wrote too much to write always well; for it is not a great Xerxes-army of words, but a compact Greek ten thousand, that march safely down to posterity. He set tasks to his divine faculty, which is much the same as trying to make Jove's eagle do the service of a clucking hen. Throughout "The Prelude" and "The Excursion" he seems striving to bind the wizard Imagination with the sand-ropes of dry disquisition, and to have forgotten the potent spell-word which would make the particles cohere. There is an arenaceous quality in the style which makes progress wearisome. Yet with what splendors as of mountain-sunsets are we rewarded! what golden rounds of verse do we not see stretching heavenward with angels ascending and descending! what haunting harmonies hover around us deep and eternal like the undying barytone of the sea! and if we are compelled to fare through sands and desert wildernesses, how often do we not hear airy shapes that syllable our names with a startling

[1] This was instinctively felt, even by his admirers. Miss Martineau said to Crabb Robinson in 1839, speaking of Wordsworth's conversation: "Sometimes he is annoying from the pertinacity with which he dwells on trifles; at other times he flows on in the utmost grandeur, leaving a strong impression of inspiration." Robinson tells us that he read *Resolution and Independence* to a lady who was affected by it even to tears, and then said, "I have not heard anything for years that so much delighted me; but, *after all, it is not poetry.*"

personal appeal to our highest consciousness and our noblest aspiration, such as we wait for in vain in any other poet! Landor, in a letter to Miss Holford, says admirably of him, "Common minds alone can be ignorant what breadth of philosophy, what energy and intensity of thought, what insight into the heart, and what observation of nature are requisite for the production of such poetry."

Take from Wordsworth all which an honest criticism cannot but allow, and what is left will show how truly great he was. He had no humor, no dramatic power, and his temperament was of that dry and juiceless quality, that in all his published correspondence you shall not find a letter, but only essays. If we consider carefully where he was most successful, we shall find that it was not so much in description of natural scenery, or delineation of character, as in vivid expression of the effect produced by external objects and events upon his own mind, and of the shape and hue (perhaps momentary) which they in turn took from his mood or temperament. His finest passages are always monologues. He had a fondness for particulars, and there are parts of his poems which remind us of local histories in the undue relative importance given to trivial matters. He was the historian of Wordsworthshire. This power of particularization (for it is as truly a power as generalization) is what gives such vigor and greatness to single lines and sentiments of Wordsworth, and to poems developing a single thought or sentiment.

It was this that made him so fond of the sonnet. That sequestered nook forced upon him the limits which his fecundity (if I may not say his garrulity) was never self-denying enough to impose on itself. It suits his solitary and meditative temper, and it was there that Lamb (an admirable judge of what was permanent in literature) liked him best. Its narrow bounds, but fourteen paces from end to end, turn into a virtue his too common fault of giving undue prominence to every passing emotion. He excels in monologue, and the law of the sonnet tempers monologue with mercy. In "The Excursion" we are driven to the subterfuge of a French verdict of extenuating circumstances. His mind had not that reach and elemental movement of Milton's, which, like the trade-wind, gathered to itself thoughts and images like stately fleets from every quarter; some deep with silks and spicery, some brooding over the silent thunders of their battailous armaments, but all swept forward in their destined track, over the long billows of his verse, every inch of canvas strained by the unifying breath of their common epic impulse. It was an organ that Milton mastered, mighty in compass, capable equally of the trumpet's ardors or the slim delicacy of the flute, and sometimes it bursts forth in great crashes through his prose, as if he touched it for solace in the intervals of his toil. If Wordsworth sometimes put the trumpet to his lips, yet he lays it aside soon and willingly for his appropriate instrument, the pastoral reed. And it is not one that grew by any vulgar stream, but that

which Apollo breathed through, tending the flocks of Admetus, — that which Pan endowed with every melody of the visible universe, — the same in which the soul of the despairing nymph took refuge and gifted with her dual nature, — so that ever and anon, amid the notes of human joy or sorrow, there comes suddenly a deeper and almost awful tone, thrilling us into dim consciousness of a forgotten divinity.

Wordsworth's absolute want of humor, while it no doubt confirmed his self-confidence by making him insensible both to the comical incongruity into which he was often led by his earlier theory concerning the language of poetry and to the not unnatural ridicule called forth by it, seems to have been indicative of a certain dulness of perception in other directions.[1] We cannot help feeling that

[1] Nowhere is this displayed with more comic self-complacency than when he thought it needful to rewrite the ballad of *Helen of Kirconnel*, — a poem hardly to be matched in any language for swiftness of movement and savage sincerity of feeling. Its shuddering compression is masterly.

> "Curst be the heart that thought the thought,
> And curst the hand that fired the shot,
> When in my arms burd Helen dropt,
> That died to succor me!
>
> O, think ye not my heart was sair
> When my love dropt down and spake na mair?"

Compare this with, —

> "Proud Gordon cannot bear the thoughts
> That through his brain are travelling,
> And, starting up, to Bruce's heart
> He launched a deadly javelin:

the material of his nature was essentially prose, which, in his inspired moments, he had the power of transmuting, but which, whenever the inspiration failed or was factitious, remained obstinately leaden. The normal condition of many poets would seem to approach that temperature to which Words-

> Fair Ellen saw it when it came,
> And, *stepping forth to meet the same*,
> Did with her body cover
> The Youth, her chosen lover.
> . . . . . .
> And Bruce (*as soon as he had slain*
> *The Gordon*) sailed away to Spain,
> And fought with rage incessant
> Against the Moorish Crescent."

These are surely the verses of an attorney's clerk "penning a stanza when he should engross." It will be noticed that Wordsworth here also departs from his earlier theory of the language of poetry by substituting a javelin for a bullet as less modern and familiar. Had he written, —

> "And Gordon never gave a hint,
> But, having somewhat picked his flint,
> Let fly the fatal bullet
> That killed that lovely pullet,"

it would hardly have seemed more like a parody than the rest. He shows the same insensibility in a note upon the *Ancient Mariner* in the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*: "The poem of my friend has indeed great defects; first, that the principal person has no distinct character, either in his profession of mariner, or as a human being who, having been long under the control of supernatural impressions, might be supposed himself to partake of something supernatural; secondly, that he does not act, but is continually acted upon; thirdly, that the events, having no necessary connection, do not produce each other; and lastly, that the imagery is somewhat laboriously accumulated." Here is an indictment, to be sure, and drawn, plainly enough, by the attorney's clerk aforenamed. One would think that the strange charm of Coleridge's most truly original poems lay in this very emancipation from the laws of cause and effect.

worth's mind could be raised only by the white heat of profoundly inward passion. And in proportion to the intensity needful to make his nature thoroughly aglow is the very high quality of his best verses. They seem rather the productions of nature than of man, and have the lastingness of such, delighting our age with the same startle of newness and beauty that pleased our youth. Is it his thought? It has the shifting inward lustre of diamond. Is it his feeling? It is as delicate as the impressions of fossil ferns. He seems to have caught and fixed forever in immutable grace the most evanescent and intangible of our intuitions, the very ripple-marks on the remotest shores of being. But this intensity of mood which insures high quality is by its very nature incapable of prolongation, and Wordsworth, in endeavoring it, falls more below himself, and is, more even than many poets his inferiors in imaginative quality, a poet of passages. Indeed, one cannot help having the feeling sometimes that the poem is there for the sake of these passages, rather than that these are the natural jets and elations of a mind energized by the rapidity of its own motion. In other words, the happy couplet or gracious image seems not to spring from the inspiration of the poem conceived as a whole, but rather to have dropped of itself into the mind of the poet in one of his rambles, who then, in a less rapt mood, has patiently built up around it a setting of verse too often ungraceful in form and of a material whose cheapness may cast a doubt on the priceless quality of the

gem it encumbers.[1] During the most happily productive period of his life, Wordsworth was impatient of what may be called the mechanical portion of his art. His wife and sister seem from the first to have been his scribes. In later years, he had learned and often insisted on the truth that poetry was an art no less than a gift, and corrected his poems in cold blood, sometimes to their detriment. But he certainly had more of the vision than of the faculty divine, and was always a little numb on the side of form and proportion. Perhaps his best poem in these respects is the "Laodamia," and it is not uninstructive to learn from his own lips that "it cost him more trouble than almost anything of equal length he had ever written." His longer poems (miscalled epical) have no more intimate bond of union than their more or less immediate relation to his own personality. Of character other than his own he had but a faint conception, and all the personages of "The Excursion" that are not Wordsworth are the merest shadows of himself upon mist, for his self-concentrated nature was incapable of projecting itself into the consciousness of other men and seeing the springs of action at their source in the recesses of individual character. The best parts of these longer poems are bursts of impassioned soliloquy, and his fingers were

[1] "A hundred times when, roving high and low,
I have been harassed with the toil of verse,
Much pains and little progress, and at once
Some lovely Image in the song rose up,
Full-formed, like Venus rising from the sea."
Prelude, Book IV.

always clumsy at the *callida junctura*. The stream of narration is sluggish, if varied by times with pleasing reflections (*viridesque placido æquore sylvas*); we are forced to do our own rowing, and only when the current is hemmed in by some narrow gorge of the poet's personal consciousness do we feel ourselves snatched along on the smooth but impetuous rush of unmistakable inspiration. The fact that what is precious in Wordsworth's poetry was (more truly even than with some greater poets than he) a gift rather than an achievement should always be borne in mind in taking the measure of his power. I know not whether to call it height or depth, this peculiarity of his, but it certainly endows those parts of his work which we should distinguish as Wordsworthian with an unexpectedness and impressiveness of originality such as we feel in the presence of Nature herself. He seems to have been half conscious of this, and recited his own poems to all comers with an enthusiasm of wondering admiration that would have been profoundly comic[1] but for its simple sincerity and for the fact that William Wordsworth, Esquire, of Rydal Mount, was one person, and the William Wordsworth whom he so heartily reverenced quite another. We recognize two voices in him, as Stephano did in Caliban. There are Jeremiah and

[1] Mr. Emerson tells us that he was at first tempted to smile, and Mr. Ellis Yarnall (who saw him in his eightieth year) says, "These quotations [from his own works] he read in a way that much impressed me; it seemed almost as if he were *awed by the greatness of his own power, the gifts with which he had been endowed.*" (The italics are mine.)

his scribe Baruch. If the prophet cease from dictating, the amanuensis, rather than be idle, employs his pen in jotting down some anecdotes of his master, how he one day went out and saw an old woman, and the next day did *not*, and so came home and dictated some verses on this ominous phenomenon, and how another day he saw a cow. These marginal annotations have been carelessly taken up into the text, have been religiously held by the pious to be orthodox scripture, and by dexterous exegesis have been made to yield deeply oracular meanings. Presently the real prophet takes up the word again and speaks as one divinely inspired, the Voice of a higher and invisible power. Wordsworth's better utterances have the bare sincerity, the absolute abstraction from time and place, the immunity from decay, that belong to the grand simplicities of the Bible. They seem not more his own than ours and every man's, the word of the inalterable Mind. This gift of his was naturally very much a matter of temperament, and accordingly by far the greater part of his finer product belongs to the period of his prime, ere Time had set his lumpish foot on the pedal that deadens the nerves of animal sensibility.[1] He did not grow as those poets do in whom the artistic sense is predom-

[1] His best poetry was written when he was under the immediate influence of Coleridge. Coleridge seems to have felt this, for it is evidently to Wordsworth that he alludes when he speaks of "those who have been so well pleased that I should, year after year, flow with a hundred nameless rills into *their* main stream." (*Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. C.*, vol. i. pp. 5–6.) "Wordsworth found fault with the repetition of the con-

inant. One of the most delightful fancies of the Genevese humorist, Toepffer, is the poet Albert, who, having had his portrait drawn by a highly idealizing hand, does his best afterwards to look like it. Many of Wordsworth's later poems seem like rather unsuccessful efforts to resemble his former self. They would never, as Sir John Harrington says of poetry, "keep a child from play and an old man from the chimney-corner." [1]

Chief Justice Marshall once blandly interrupted a junior counsel who was arguing certain obvious points of law at needless length, by saying, "Brother Jones, there are *some* things which a Supreme Court of the United States sitting in equity may be presumed to know." Wordsworth has this fault of enforcing and restating obvious points till the reader feels as if his own intelligence were somewhat underrated. He is over-conscientious in giving us full measure, and once profoundly absorbed in the sound of his own voice, he knows not when to stop. If he feel himself flagging, he has a droll way of keeping the floor, as it were, by asking himself a series of questions sometimes not

cluding sound of the participles in Shakespeare's line about bees:

'The singing masons building roofs of gold.'

This, he said, was a line that Milton never would have written. Keats thought, on the other hand, that the repetition was in harmony with the continued note of the singers." (Leigh Hunt's *Autobiography*.) Wordsworth writes to Crabb Robinson in 1837, "My ear is susceptible to the clashing of sounds almost to disease." One cannot help thinking that his training in these niceties was begun by Coleridge.

[1] In the Preface to his translation of the *Orlando Furioso*.

needing, and often incapable of answer. There are three stanzas of such near the close of the First Part of "Peter Bell," where Peter first catches a glimpse of the dead body in the water, all happily incongruous, and ending with one which reaches the height of comicality: —

> "Is it a fiend that to a stake
> Of fire his desperate self is tethering?
> Or stubborn spirit doomed to yell,
> In solitary ward or cell,
> Ten thousand miles from all his brethren?"

The same want of humor which made him insensible to incongruity may perhaps account also for the singular unconsciousness of disproportion which so often strikes us in his poetry. For example, a little farther on in "Peter Bell" we find: —

> "*Now* — like a tempest-shattered bark
> That overwhelmed and prostrate lies,
> And in a moment to the verge
> Is lifted of a foaming surge —
> Full suddenly the Ass doth rise!"

And one cannot help thinking that the similes of the huge stone, the sea-beast, and the cloud, noble as they are in themselves, are somewhat too lofty for the service to which they are put.[1]

The movement of Wordsworth's mind was too slow and his mood too meditative for narrative poetry. He values his own thoughts and reflections too much to sacrifice the least of them to the interests of his story. Moreover, it is never action that interests him, but the subtle motives that lead to or hinder it. "The Wagoner" involuntarily suggests

[1] In *Resolution and Independence*.

a comparison with "Tam O'Shanter" infinitely to its own disadvantage. "Peter Bell," full though it be of profound touches and subtle analysis, is lumbering and disjointed. Even Lamb was forced to confess that he did not like it. "The White Doe," the most Wordsworthian of them all in the best meaning of the epithet, is also only the more truly so for being diffuse and reluctant. What charms in Wordsworth and will charm forever is the

> "Happy tone
> Of meditation slipping in between
> The beauty coming and the beauty gone."

A few poets, in the exquisite adaptation of their words to the tune of our own feelings and fancies, in the charm of their manner, indefinable as the sympathetic grace of woman, *are* everything to us without our being able to say that they are much in themselves. They rather narcotize than fortify. Wordsworth must subject our mood to his own before he admits us to his intimacy; but, once admitted, it is for life, and we find ourselves in his debt, not for what he has been to us in our hours of relaxation, but for what he has done for us as a reinforcement of faltering purpose and personal independence of character. His system of a Nature-cure, first professed by Dr. Jean Jacques and continued by Cowper, certainly breaks down as a whole. The Solitary of "The Excursion," who has not been cured of his scepticism by living among the medicinal mountains, is, so far as we can see, equally proof against the lectures of Pedler and

Parson. Wordsworth apparently felt that this would be so, and accordingly never saw his way clear to finishing the poem. But the treatment, whether a panacea or not, is certainly wholesome, inasmuch as it inculcates abstinence, exercise, and uncontaminate air. I am not sure, indeed, that the Nature-cure theory does not tend to foster in constitutions less vigorous than Wordsworth's what Milton would call a fugitive and cloistered virtue at a dear expense of manlier qualities. The ancients and our own Elizabethans, ere spiritual megrims had become fashionable, perhaps made more out of life by taking a frank delight in its action and passion and by grappling with the facts of this world, rather than muddling themselves over the insoluble problems of another. If they had not discovered the picturesque, as we understand it, they found surprisingly fine scenery in man and his destiny, and would have seen something ludicrous, it may be suspected, in the spectacle of a grown man running to hide his head in the apron of the Mighty Mother whenever he had an ache in his finger or got a bruise in the tussle for existence.

But when, as I have said, our impartiality has made all those qualifications and deductions against which even the greatest poet may not plead his privilege, what is left to Wordsworth is enough to justify his fame. Even where his genius is wrapped in clouds, the unconquerable lightning of imagination struggles through, flashing out unexpected vistas, and illuminating the humdrum pathway of our daily thought with a radiance of mo-

mentary consciousness that seems like a revelation. If it be the most delightful function of the poet to set our lives to music, yet perhaps he will be even more sure of our maturer gratitude if he do his part also as moralist and philosopher to purify and enlighten; if he define and encourage our vacillating perceptions of duty; if he piece together our fragmentary apprehensions of our own life and that larger life whose unconscious instruments we are, making of the jumbled bits of our dissected map of experience a coherent chart. In the great poets there is an exquisite sensibility both of soul and sense that sympathizes like gossamer sea-moss with every movement of the element in which it floats, but which is rooted on the solid rock of our common sympathies. Wordsworth shows less of this finer feminine fibre of organization than one or two of his contemporaries, notably than Coleridge or Shelley; but he was a masculine thinker, and in his more characteristic poems there is always a kernel of firm conclusion from far-reaching principles that stimulates thought and challenges meditation. Groping in the dark passages of life, we come upon some axiom of his, as it were a wall that gives us our bearings and enables us to find an outlet. Compared with Goethe we feel that he lacks that serene impartiality of mind which results from breadth of culture; nay, he seems narrow, insular, almost provincial. He reminds us of those saints of Dante who gather brightness by revolving on their own axis. But through this very limitation of range he gains perhaps in intensity and the im-

pressiveness which results from eagerness of personal conviction. If we read Wordsworth through, as I have just done, we find ourselves changing our mind about him at every other page, so uneven is he. If we read our favorite poems or passages only, he will seem uniformly great. And even as regards "The Excursion" we should remember how few long poems will bear consecutive reading. For my part I know of but one, — the Odyssey.

None of our great poets can be called popular in any exact sense of the word, for the highest poetry deals with thoughts and emotions which inhabit, like rarest sea-mosses, the doubtful limits of that shore between our abiding divine and our fluctuating human nature, rooted in the one, but living in the other, seldom laid bare, and otherwise visible only at exceptional moments of entire calm and clearness. Of no other poet except Shakespeare have so many phrases become household words as of Wordsworth. If Pope has made current more epigrams of worldly wisdom, to Wordsworth belongs the nobler praise of having defined for us, and given us for a daily possession, those faint and vague suggestions of other-worldliness of whose gentle ministry with our baser nature the hurry and bustle of life scarcely ever allowed us to be conscious. He has won for himself a secure immortality by a depth of intuition which makes only the best minds at their best hours worthy, or indeed capable, of his companionship, and by a homely sincerity of human sympathy which reaches the humblest heart. Our language owes him gratitude

for the habitual purity and abstinence of his style, and we who speak it, for having emboldened us to take delight in simple things, and to trust ourselves to our own instincts. And he hath his reward. It needs not to bid

> "Renowned Spenser, lie a thought more nigh
> To learned Chaucer, and rare Beaumond lie
> A little nearer Spenser";

for there is no fear of crowding in that little society with whom he is now enrolled as fifth in the succession of the great English Poets.

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